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ABSTRACT

This publication describes the work of the Servol program in Trinidad and Tobago. The Servol organization was started in Port of Spain in 1970 by Gerry Pantin. Servol's approach to helping disadvantaged people implies that one should never presume to know the needs of people; rather, one should ask them what their needs are. This approach produces attitudes of attentive listening and respectful intervention. Servol's principal service is to preschool children and late adolescents. The organization operates 31 Life Centres at which an Adolescent Development Programme (ADP), job skills training courses, parenting programs, and training programs for its own teachers are offered. The ADP course addresses spiritual, physical, intellectual, creative, emotional, and social needs in an attempt to help adolescents overcome such problems as low self-esteem. Servol works with the Ministry of Education and individual community boards of education to operate preschools. The Caribbean Life Centre in Port of Spain is a training centre for early childhod educators thrcughout the Caribbean. The participation of parents in preschools is welcomed. Servol's hidden agenda is to influence parents and future parents. A list of publications of the Bernard van Leer Foundation is included. (BC)

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What is the Bernard van Leer Foundation?

The Foundation takes its name from Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist who died in 1958 and gave the entire share capital of his worldwide enterprise for humanitarian purposes.

What does the Foundation do?

The Foundation supports innovative projects which are designed to improve the educational, social and developmental opportunities of children from birth to eight years of age. Over 100 major projects are currently being suppported in over 40 countries around the world including both industrialised and developing nations. In all cases, the focus is on those children and communities that are least able to benefit from educational and developmental opportunities because of social and other forms of disadvantage. These include the children of ethnic and cultural minorities, children living in urban slums, shanty towns, and remote rural areas, and children of teenage parents.

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cover illustration: Melanie de la Rosa, aged 4 years 3 months, Piarco, Trinidad

(continued on inside back cover)

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Shaping tomorrow

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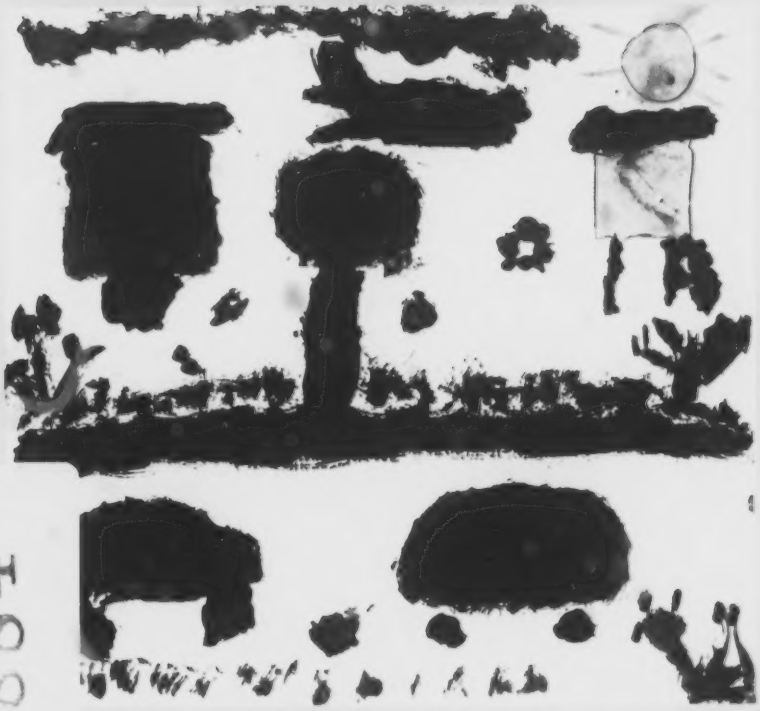

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The Servol programmes in Trinidad and Tobago

Ruth N Cohen

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Shaping tomorrow

The Servol programmes in Trinidad and Tobago

Ruth N Cohen

Bernard van Leer Foundation
1991

About the author

Ruth Cohen is Head of the Communications Section at the Bernard van Leer Foundation where she has been working since 1986. Her responsibilities include the Foundation's quarterly Newsletter and its publications and media programme. She was born in London, England where she worked in community development and consumer affairs. She is the author of *Whose file is it anyway?* published by the National Council for Civil Liberties.

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WHO SHALL I BLAME?

Look at me, take a good look at me, it's just me and meh drugs and meh old clothes. This old shirt that can't even keep off the cold wind in the night. Could you imagine that I went to school and now I don't have a thing to show? Who shall I blame?

I know who I will blame, I will blame my friends, yes my friends, because when I was trying to learn my work, they had me talking in class and they only used to distract me. Yes I will blame my friends. No, I will blame my teacher. She never used to teach properly. She never say as a good teacher should: 'Boy understand your school work is very important.' Yes, I shall blame her.

Wait! The Government! Yuh see the Government, I will blame the Government. If when I did leave school the Government had work, I would of never had to go by my friends to ask them for money for them to indulge me in this drugs. I might of been some big manager of some big business. I will blame the Government.

My mother and my father. Is them. I will blame them. Because from small they was in charge of me. To teach me this is the right or wrong way to do this. Some socialisation, or so they does call it. Yes it is my parents to blame.

What that Pastor saying across the road there? 'The sins of the parents shall fall upon the third and fourth generation to those that hate him.' So what he saying is that my ancestor have me in this situation. 'Third and fourth generation' so I paying for my ancestor's sins, you see how life unfair, poor me never do anything wrong, but I end up paying. Is a Pastor say it, he ain't go lie, so is my ancestor to blame.

What you all watching me so for like it is me to blame? Is me? But is me yes, I have the choice to do good or evil, to do right or wrong. You have a mind of your own, whether you want to stay with your drugs and kill yourself or whether you want to get up as a man and get rid of the drugs. So it's no one to blame but me, only me ... me ... me.

This book is dedicated to Gerard Asyn, a Trinidadian teenager who wrote this prose poem and read it out at an Open Day in April 1990 at the end of a Servol Adolescent Development Programme. It is also dedicated to all his fellow students, past, present and future; to all the pre-school teachers of Trinidad and Tobago and all the other Caribbean territories; to the small children they teach, to the parents of those children and to their communities; and to all the people who work for and with Servol. Without them this book would not have been written; with them there is hope for all our futures.

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above: countries with Foundation-supported projects

right: Trinidad and Tobago

Glossary

ADP: Adolescent Development Programme – see Chapter Two.

common entrance: An examination taken by school children in Trinidad and Tobago at the age of 11 which determines what type of further schooling they are eligible for. It is based on the '11 plus' or scholarship examination which used to perform the same function in the United Kingdom.

CXC 'O' level: Caribbean Examination Certificate, Ordinary Level. A set of examinations taken by school children at the age of 16.

Life Centres: Training centres for adolescents – see Chapter Two.

liming: The word 'liming' is a Trinidadian invention although the activity is widespread. To lime means to hang around in groups talking to pass the time.

Montessori: A teaching method named after Maria Montessori (1870-1952) who developed a series of principles, activities and materials based on a child's developmental needs. Although applicable to children from birth to school leaving age, the methodology is usually only applied in pre-schools.

NAR: National Alliance for Reconstruction – the political party which won the general election in Trinidad and Tobago in December 1986.

PNM: People's National Movement – the political party which was in power in Trinidad and Tobago from 1956 until 1986.

pre-school: The word pre-school has been used throughout this book as a form of shorthand to indicate the various types of provision made for children under five years of age. Many of the Servol pre-schools are, in fact, called early childhood centres while many of the private pre-schools in Trinidad and Tobago are called nursery schools.

rap sessions: Rap sessions are basically free-for-all discussions which can cover any topic and have no set agenda.

SPICES: A curriculum which has been developed by Servol and is now used as the basis for all its programmes. It is aimed at the development of the whole person and stands for Spiritual, Physical, Intellectual, Creative, Emotional, Social.

TT$: The Trinidad and Tobago dollar is the local unit of currency. All TT$ amounts in this book can be converted to US$ using the exchange rate applicable in April 1990 which was US$1 = TT$4.25

YTEPP: Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme – see Chapter Three.

Some basic facts about Trinidad and Tobago

Physical

Trinidad: 80 x 59 km approx
Tobago: 42 x 5 km approx

Population

total: 1,243,000 (estimate 1988)[1]
Trinidad: 1,198,000 (estimate 1988)
Tobago: 45,000 (estimate 1988)

under 16 (1988): 0.4m[2]
under 5 (1988): 0.1m

annual growth rate[2] 1965 - 1980: 1.3%
1980 - 1987: 1.6%

urbanised population[3] 1965: 30%
1988: 67%

average annual growth rate of urban population[2]
1965 - 1980: 5.0%
1980 - 1987: 3.6%

of African descent: 40.8%[1]
of Indian descent: 40.7%
of mixed descent: 16.3%
others: 2.2%

Religion[1]

Catholic: 33.6%
Hindu: 25%
Anglican: 15%
Moslem: 5.9%
Others: 20.5%

Economic indicators

GNP per capita 1987:[3] US$4,210
Official development assistance[3]
1985: US$7m
1986: US$19m
1987: US$34m
per capita 1987: US$28
total external debt 1987: US$1,801m

Share of household income 1975 - 1986[2]

lowest 40% of population:	13%
highest 20% of population:	50%

Population below absolute poverty level 1977 - 1987[2]

urban:	not available
rural:	39%

Health

life expectancy at birth[3]	1965	1987
male	63	67
female	67	73

	1960	1988
infant mortality rate[2]	54	20
under 5 mortality rate[2]	67	23

Education

adult literacy rate[2]	1970	1985
male	95	97
female	89	95

percentage of age group enrolled in education[4]

	1965	1986
primary	93	95
secondary	36	76
tertiary	2	4

school populations[4]

	1985	1990 (projected)
pre-school population (3-4)	53,975	58,030
pre-school enrolment	21,957	29,000
primary population (5-11)	171,400	183,383
primary school enrolment	167,443	181,470
11+ population	24,500	24,430
first form accommodation	20,400	22,700

SOURCES:

1. *The Statesman's Year Book 1990-91*. The Macmillan Press Ltd. London, 1990
2. *The State of the World's Children 1990*. Oxford University Press for UNICEF, Oxford, 1990
3. *World Development Report 1989*. Oxford University Press for the World Bank, New York, 1989
4. *Education Plan 1985-1990*. Ministry of Education, Schools Publications Branch, Port of Spain, 1985

Foreword

I appear to have developed a mental block when anyone speaks to me of writing a book about Servol. This may seem strange coming from someone who has written quite a few books and articles on the subject; paradoxically, it is precisely because of these efforts that I have sensed within myself a growing frustration with the subject. The reason is that it is extraordinarily difficult to capture Servol in print or on film. It has been described as a mole cricket, a village, an experience and, more latterly, as Jacob's Ladder,[1] and these widely disparate metaphors indicate the difficulty experienced by a number of people in planning it down.

When I spoke with Ruth Cohen some two years ago in the offices of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, she pointed out that some time had elapsed since something had been published on Servol, and that it was necessary to fill this gap in view of the significant development of the organisation over the last six years. My dismay at the proposition turned to relief and gratitude when she agreed that I was too close to the subject to write such a book and she was prepared to have a shot at it. Almost immediately, I began to feel sorry for her because I really believed it was a well-nigh impossible task.

Why? First, because Servol is so many things at the same time:

- a non-governmental organisation which doubles as an agent for the Ministry of Education in implementing two large national programmes,
- an organisation which concentrates its efforts on non-formal education but which brings a very definite structure into its projects,
- a group of over a hundred people who are all committed to sensitive listening to any individual in trouble but which prides itself on efficiency and effectiveness,
- a movement which glories in its pragmatism and spontaneity but which has a carefully formulated operational plan for the next 20 years,
- a deeply religious organisation which politely avoids all Church institutions.

How on earth, I thought, will Ruth Cohen succeed in putting all this together?

Second, Servol is a voluntary organisation which has germinated and flowered in a Third World country called Trinidad and Tobago and owes very little to any other NGO model whether First or Third World; it is uniquely a Trinidadian thing. How can anyone from a European country hope to capture the essence, the spirit of this peculiarly rambunctious organisation, spawned by a Roman Catholic priest, a Barbadian Test cricketer and a motley group of sailors, soldiers, tradesmen, housewives and religious sisters? Did Ruth Cohen realise what she had taken on?

Translating an experience into words

If all of the above were not enough, the effort to write a book about Servol flounders on the shoals of a particularly perilous reef: if Servol is anything, it is an experience and everyone is aware of the extraordinary difficulty involved in translating an experience into words. Poor Ruth Cohen, I thought; how will she face up to that particular problem?

Undaunted, Ruth came to Trinidad in April 1990 and spent a month in close contact with our organisation. Initial reactions from the Servol ranks were positive. It was whispered that she said very little but spent most of her time listening to all kinds of people – from trainees and teachers, to field officers and administrators. The subtle examination which all visitors have to undergo revealed that she scored low in cultural arrogance and high in respectful intervention, with the result that we accepted her as one of us, forgot about her and went back to our routine tasks.

I remember, very distinctly, the day when I became convinced that she was beginning to absorb the experience which is Servol. It was open day at the Beetham Life Centre and some 75 trainees who had just concluded their three and a half month training course, were trying to explain to a group of over a hundred parents, guardians and staff, the significant change which had been wrought in them by the Adolescent Development Programme. Though I have sat through a few dozen open day presentations, there is never an instance in which I fail to be deeply moved by what is said so openly and honestly. There I sat, next to Ruth, tears streaming down my face as trainee after trainee said their piece. I stole a glance at her and realised she was crying quietly like practically everyone else in the room. I relaxed, well satisfied; Servol had got to her.

So when she sent me the manuscript of her book I was not surprised to see that she had quietly and effectively withdrawn into the background and was content to let the people of Servol speak for themselves through the pages of her book. Personally, I think it is the only way to communicate the experience to people who have never seen or touched Servol. Through the pages of her book, readers will hear the authentic voices of the people who constitute

Servol. She has captured the commitment of the field officers, the struggles of the adolescents, the enthusiasm of the early childhood educators, the stumblings of the Village Boards of Education, the watchfulness of the co-ordinators, the fascination of the parenting programme, the aches and pains of the daily routine, the frustration involved in dealing with Government bureaucracies, the complex, intricate, interaction at so many different levels. If her description leaves the reader with a feeling of bewilderment, it is because Servol is in fact a bewildering thing; if it produces the reaction that it sounds too good to be true, it is because many of us do share this view; if the final effect is that of an organisation which breaks all the conventions and norms and still manages to work, it is because this is largely true.

That Servol does work in Trinidad and Tobago is proved by the history of the last 20 years; in fact it works extraordinarily well, to an extent that a number of people from other Caribbean territories as well as a few from further afield have dropped in to have a closer look at the organisation and see to what extent it is replicable elsewhere. Confronted with the question of replicability, we tend to answer very cautiously and our response is based on philosophical grounds.

Attentive listening and respectful intervention

We believe that if Servol can be considered to be in any way successful, this is due to our fidelity to our twin policies of attentive listening and respectful intervention; if we have faltered anywhere along the line, this can be traced back inevitably to our having fallen short in the application of these principles.

It is authentically human to wish to be 'looked upon', to be treated with respect, to have one's views listened to and to be empowered to shape one's destiny. With this in mind, we see no problem whatever in advocating this philosophical approach in dealing with people of any country and any ethnic origin.

We accept the fact that this approach calls for incredible patience; did we not spend the first four years groping around in the dark without attempting to formulate any structured programme? For us there is simply no other way; you simply have to stay with the thing, limit yourself to establishing tentative *projects* of all sorts, until the slow process of development has engulfed, amoeba-like, the entire organisation and a large part of the community, at which juncture you are ready to transform your projects into more structured programmes.

The alternative is to impose your own brilliant, pre-conceived ideas on to a passive, receptive community which has been so accustomed to being the victim of cultural arrogance that they have never learnt to say 'no' to anyone. So you enthusiastically pump finance and ideas into an apathetic community, experience a quick flare-up of activity, followed by a gradual decline into their own characteristic brand of somnolence; and all that remains is a building or two as concrete evidence that Kilroy was there.

Because of this, we always feel a bit uncomfortable when a visitor arrives and makes contact with us at one of our major centres. We sense the awe and respect in their eyes as they see the obvious signs of a disciplined, efficient, well-run organisation with its computerised accounting system, its tautly-run training units, its cadre of energetic field officers and its well-documented resource centres. A deep part of us cries out: 'Do not be confused or overawed by this plethora of structures which have taken twenty years to evolve. This is not how it began and this is not how it works. Come with us to a little village somewhere in Trinidad or Tobago. There you will see a tiny early childhood centre or an adolescent Life Centre with a couple of teachers and a dozen or two pupils surrounded by the community. This is the heart of the Servol experience, this is how it begins'.

How did it in fact begin? It began with a small group of people making contact with a number of grassroots communities and asking the simple question: 'How can we help you?' Interestingly enough, the approach has not varied over the last 20 years, though the ensuing dialogue has become more sophisticated. As evidence of this, we would cite the way in which each of the 194 early childhood and adolescent training centres presently being administered by Servol were initiated.

A year or two or five ago, a group of villagers read an advertisement in the newspapers or heard from a neighbouring village that Servol was prepared to help any group of people set up training centres for their 3-5 year old children or their 17-19 year old adolescents. As a result of the ensuing dialogue between the group and the organisation, a village Board of Education was formed and a simple structure was built. While this was going on, Servol was training selected people from the village as teachers. With the subsequent opening of a centre monitored by the Board and supervised by Servol, quality training was offered to children or adolescents or both.

An exercise in power-sharing

Servol sees in this type of venture an exercise in *power-sharing* in which the Ministry of Education, the village and Servol become equal partners in the programme, so that not only are children taught and adolescents trained but there is a significant rise in the educational awareness of the entire village

and a slow development of people's confidence to initiate and run a project with a minimum of outside assistance.

We are convinced that this aspect of the Servol programme is indeed replicable and adaptable to varying cultures and socio-economic groups. With Servol, specific programmes focus on parenting skills centred around early childhood and adolescent centres. It could just as easily be built around agricultural projects, micro-enterprises, cooperatives or whatever it is the community in question deems important. It is crucial that the initiative comes from the people, that they continue to be involved in planning and implementing the project and that all decisions are taken by them and not by the catalysing agency.

I think that Ruth Cohen has succeeded in her efforts to paint an accurate picture of what Servol is all about precisely because she has produced a type of post-Impressionistic work with deliberately blurred images rather than something with the clear cut lines of an El Greco. Nothing in Servol is perfectly clear or set out in an orderly fashion for the simple reason that:

> Servol is fundamentally about weak, frail, ordinary, imperfect, yet hope-filled and committed people seeking to help weak, frail, ordinary, imperfect, hope-drained people to re-find and refine their innate strength, confidence and hope – for a better life for all.'[2]

I hope that this is the principal message that readers will get from this book: an abiding faith in the ability of very ordinary people to do extraordinary things if given the opportunity. In allowing the people who are Servol to sing their own song in their own way, Ruth Cohen has opened up endless possibilities of polyphonic harmonies which have lain undiscovered in the music composed by disparate groups of people who choose to work together; because now, more than ever, there is an urgent need for the nations of this world to 'sing a new song for the Lord'.

Gerard Pantin C.S.Sp.
Executive Director, Servol
February 1991

1 Weber R., *Scaling up Jacob's Ladder: community development in Trinidad and Tobago, 20 years of Servol*. Servol with Inter-American Foundation, Port of Spain, 1990

2 Proposed action plan for Servol for the period 1990-2000, Servol, Port of Spain, 1990

Port of Spain
El Socorro
Sangre Grande
Chaguanas
San Fernando

Trinidad

CHAPTER ONE

Respectful intervention

> If there is anything replicable in the Servol experience it is the approach and the methodology and not the projects or the concrete structures. Listening, consulting with the community, having the patience to wait and to proceed at the pace of the people, these are the skills necessary for community workers wherever in the world they work.[1]

This book is about an organisation called Servol. It is a very odd organisation; it is also a very exciting one. It operates out of Port of Spain and its activities cover much of the two-island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Its influence, however, has spread to other parts of the Caribbean and even further afield.

At the end of the 1970s, the founder of Servol likened the organisation to a mole cricket,[2] a tiny animal which burrows through tunnels it makes under the ground, confident that it will eventually see the light of day. By 1984, the same writer was characterising it as a village.[3] Now, in 1991, he says that if Servol is anything, it is an experience. If the man who is the heart and soul of Servol cannot describe it succinctly, there is little chance that anyone else is going to be able to do so. A mole cricket that becomes a village only serves to illustrate how impervious Servol is to neat categorisation.

Perhaps it would be easier to begin at the beginning.

The name Servol stands for Service Volunteered for All. The organisation started in 1970 in Trinidad as a consequence of civil disorder. This was the so-called Black Power Uprising when

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people from the shanty towns of the capital, Port of Spain, and a number of army officers began by protesting the social conditions of the poor and ended by attempting to overthrow the government. The attempt failed but the event had an electrifying effect on the hitherto easygoing society of Trinidad and Tobago. One of the consequences was that a Roman Catholic priest called Gerard Pantin gave up his job teaching science at one of the best schools in the country and decided to try to help the people with their problems.

Listening to the people

Gerry Pantin was not trained as a social worker or as a community worker and he later realised that this lack was one of his great advantages. Not knowing what to do, he went to the people in the shanty towns and he asked them what they needed. And he listened to what they told him.

What Pantin did was to 'lime' with the groups on the street corners of Laventille, an area literally and metaphorically on the fringes of Port of Spain. Liming is a well-known Trinidadian pastime (not unknown in other parts of the world) which basically consists of hanging around in small or large groups, talking to pass the day. With one companion,[4] he spent weeks talking to people who were suspicious of all outsiders. The area was inhabited by people who, for a wide variety of reasons, were poorly educated and poorly housed, had little chance of finding or holding down a job, and who believed that their ability to succeed in life was virtually nil. A major problem was the lack of a stable family life. Many homes were without fathers; many children were left to wander the streets for much of the day and night.

Pantin never offered to give anything to any individual or group. He asked people what they needed, he listened to their replies, and when something came up that appeared possible, he made a deal: let us share the cost or let us share the effort.

Conditioned to failure

Within two months the organisation had acquired its name and Pantin had gathered some voluntary co-workers around him.[5] It became obvious to him, after hours of listening, that the underlying problem was that children who had grown up without love, who had been kicked around and used by others, tended to repeat the process when they became adults. Having experienced a series of failures, they became conditioned to failure.

But this was too big a problem for Servol to tackle, so it started with practical, achievable work. Thus the fledgling organisation helped communities to acquire the necessary equipment for recreational facilities; it established

vocational training courses; it helped groups to set up pre-schools and trained local women to teach in them.

The first Life Centre

By 1975 Servol had set up several dozen courses for young people in skills as varied as welding, music, plumbing, painting, child care and carpentry. Although much of the work was still in Port of Spain (scattered in various locations), forays had been made into central Trinidad and to Tobago. In order to bring together some of the organisation's activities under one roof, Servol began work on a building on a new housing estate called the Beetham, many of whose inhabitants had been rehoused from Laventille where Servol had started. In typical Servol fashion, the construction was undertaken almost entirely by its own trainees. The new building, which became the first Servol Life Centre, was opened in 1978. Activities included training in a number of vocational skills, and the Centre became the breeding ground for a unique course that has come to be known as the Adolescent Development Programme (ADP). The ADP at the Beetham, and in the Life Centres which have since been opened, is described in Chapters two and three.

Very young children have been at the heart of Servol from the beginning. From its early attempts to help communities set up their own pre-schools and to train young women from the community to run them, Servol has evolved a fully-fledged pre-school teacher training programme. Based at the Caribbean Life Centre in the heart of Port of Spain (and also constructed largely by Servol trainees), the course, consisting of one year full-time study and two years' internship, has been accredited by the University of Oxford in England. The training programme is based on far more than child development and teaching methods. It puts major emphasis on parental and community involvement, which are given equal weight to classroom teaching ability during training, internship, and certification. Chapters four, five and six describe the programme, the people who run it and the people who participate in it: students, parents, children and communities.

It is ironic that for the first 16 years of its existence, Servol was recognised and appreciated more by people outside its home base than inside it. But at the end of 1986, the government of Trinidad and Tobago asked Servol to cooperate in the dissemination of its two major programmes – for adolescents and for pre-schools – throughout the country. This has led to a major shift in the organisation which, by September 1990, was responsible for 31 Life Centres (for adolescents) and 155 pre-schools. All the new facilities are run under the auspices of joint Ministry of Education/Servol programmes and are locally managed by Boards of Education made up of members of the communities.

A philosophy of ignorance

In the course of its 20 years, Servol has evolved its own vernacular to describe its basic philosophy and method of approach.

> Anyone trying to help disadvantaged people should base his [or her] approach on a *philosophy of ignorance*. Expressed simply, this means that you should never presume that you know the needs of people: ask them what these needs are and what type of help they want. The next step is that of *attentive listening*. You should listen carefully to what the people tell you, convinced that their voice is the most important element in their own development and you should continue to adopt this listening stance throughout your dialogue with them.
>
> What pernicious attitude exists in each one of us that prevents us from offering genuine help to a fellow-man and which attentive listening seeks to eradicate? It is the attitude of *cultural arrogance* which tends to make people believe that because they come from a certain country or ethnic background or have benefited from a certain type of education that this makes them superior to other people. In Servol's view, it is only when a serious attempt is made to grapple with that problematical attitude, that people are entitled to interfere in the lives of others through a process of *respectful intervention*. The only way to help another is to do so respectfully, conscious that we both have a lot to learn from the dialogue and that we will both emerge richer for the experience.[6]

Fundamental to this approach is self-development, the principle that individuals and communities are helped to develop at their own pace, in accordance with their own needs, and at a level that they can afford. Servol is not a welfare organisation; it does not give handouts to anyone. Respectful intervention also means respect for the other's dignity – those who receive also give, and those who give receive much.

Expressed and underlying needs

Over the years Servol has been involved in agriculture, in fisheries, in medical services, in adult education, in local community development, in small business enterprises. All of its programmes have emerged in response to the needs – both expressed and underlying – of the people it has been working with.

In the very earliest days, the expressed needs were for jobs, care for young children and recreational facilities. Addressing the expressed needs enabled

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Pantin and his colleagues to find ways of approaching the underlying needs. They have not by any measure solved the problems of family life or poverty or inadequate housing or unemployment. But they have learned to motivate people in a way that the people themselves do not believe possible. They are tackling the breakdown in family life, helping people to become aware of the needs of children and their own needs, and enabling people to acquire marketable skills so that they can earn a living for themselves and their families. People are beginning to believe in themselves.

A new Caribbean person

But who are these people? In 1986 Gerry Pantin characterised Servol as attempting 'to develop a new Caribbean man, one who is equipped to deal with the struggle for survival in today's world.'[7] He used the word Caribbean, rather than Trinidadian, because although Servol is a wholly Trinidadian organisation, it has worked for many years with individuals, organisations and governments in other Caribbean territories. And although he used the word man, he was most assuredly also talking about the women of the region, many of whom are left on their own to bring up their families and to build their new society.

The Caribbean is a region full of contrasts. It enjoys a superb climate, generally fertile soil, high literacy rates, mainly democratic governments. But the individual nation-states are small; they still suffer from the practical and psychological after-effects of colonialism; most of the present population's ancestors were brought to the islands either as slaves or as indentured labourers; their economies are fragile to say the least. Above all, they exist in the shadow of a giant neighbour, the United States of America, which exerts a very strong economic, political and cultural influence on them.

Colonial past

The two islands of Trinidad and Tobago have been an independent nation since 1962, a republic since 1976. Traces of the Arawak and Carib Indians who were the original inhabitants of these islands can occasionally be seen in the features of present day citizens but, as in many parts of the Americas, the colonialists' way of life ensured that the indigenous people were eliminated. Both islands were seen as stepping-off points for the fabled gold of South America, and Trinidad passed from Spanish to British hands in 1797, although its European residents, then and later, were from many nations, particularly France. Tobago was claimed variously by the English, Spanish, Dutch and French and was eventually joined administratively to Trinidad in 1897 under British rule.

About 41 per cent of the present population of the country is of African origin.

Their ancestors came as slaves, either directly from Africa or, more often, via other Caribbean islands. While Tobago in the eighteenth century was a plantation society, Trinidad's plantations began to expand only in the nineteenth century. Slavery was abolished in theory in 1833, in practice in 1838. The vast majority of former slaves left the land and their place was taken by indentured labourers (a system which has been called semi-slavery) brought from India. Between 1845 and 1917 around 144,000 'East Indians' came to Trinidad. The term 'East Indians' is used to describe their descendants, to differentiate them by origin from 'West Indians' which refers to the inhabitants of the West Indies (the islands in the Caribbean). East Indians now account for around 41 per cent of the population and many of them are still dependant on the land. Thus, although there are black people in agriculture and East Indians in business, the professions and in urban areas, the urban population of Trinidad is mainly of African origin while the rural population is mainly of East Indian origin. Tobago, with no large urban centres and little industry apart from tourism, has a population that is almost entirely of African origin.

The boom years

The two islands are very different from one another, and not just in size. They are separated by about 30 kilometers of ocean, just 12 minutes by air or eight hours by ferry. Known as 'Robinson Crusoe's island', Tobago is literally a tropical paradise with white palm-fringed beaches, forested mountains and an abundance of beautiful flora and fauna. Trinidad, on the other hand, is not in any sense a tourist island, despite a few good beaches and very good nature reserves. Over two-thirds of the population is urban and nearly a quarter live in the capital. Oil was discovered in Trinidad as far back as 1857 but it was not commercially exploited until the beginning of this century. Much of Trinidad's economy was based on the oil industry, so that when the price of oil increased in 1974, it led to what are referred to by Trinidadians as 'the boom years'.

For almost ten years until the oil prices slumped, Trinidad was, on paper at least, a rich country. Wages and inflation increased; a few people became very rich indeed. Although new jobs provided employment for some, others remained poor. By the end of the boom years, agriculture had virtually disappeared and the country was importing most of its food. As oil revenues fell, unemployment rose. On the political front the same party, the People's National Movement (PNM), was in power from 1956 until 1986, when the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) won 33 of the 36 seats in the lower house of Parliament.

'The rainbow that is real'

Its tourist board describes Trinidad and Tobago as 'the rainbow that is real'. The rainbow is used to describe the stunning colours of the sky, the sea, the beaches, forests, sunsets and flora and fauna. It is used to describe the many festivals and cultural events which fill the streets with parades, costumes, songs and dances: primarily Carnival but also *Divali* and *Phagwa* and *Hosay* and Christmas. Above all, the rainbow is used to describe the people of the two islands, whose ancestors came not only from Africa and India but also from China, Syria, Lebanon, Spain, France, Portugal, the United Kingdom and many other places and who 'like the rainbow, harmonise so well together we have produced a mix of colours, a blending of races into a new people'.[8]

Like all glossy brochures written for visitors the world over, the images painted in words and pictures give only one side of the story. The Caribbean colours are indeed exceptionally beautiful; Carnival is the single most important annual event in the calendar. People of many different races and beliefs live alongside one another without notable hostility for most of the time.

Symptoms of malaise

But Trinidad in 1990 could not be called a happy country. In July the country hit the world's headlines when a small group of Black Muslims took the Prime Minister and his Cabinet hostage in the Parliament buildings. Other events were happening in the world and after a few days, the situation in Port of Spain was relegated to the inside pages of the newspapers and dropped out of the television news broadcasts.

The insurrection, a sad reminder of the uprising which led to the founding of Servol 20 years earlier, proved to be the work of a small group of unrepresentative and misguided zealots. But it sparked off unprecedented looting which wrecked whole areas of Port of Spain. This has to be viewed as a symptom of a malaise throughout the society. There is poverty and malnutrition; unemployment is reaching 20 per cent. The incidence of violent crime is growing at an appalling rate and most of it is drugs-related. The infrastructure is falling apart at the seams; very little – be it water or electricity supplies, education, health and transport services, government bureaucracy or private industry – appears to work efficiently. A materialist culture, based on a belief that whatever comes from its giant northern neighbour is good, threatens to supersede another way of life built up by this intriguing mixture of people who make up the society. Yet, however high the crime rate, however grinding the poverty, the vast majority of the population are law-abiding, kind and hospitable to one another and to strangers.

The experience that is Servol

The idea for this book came during 1989 when Gerry Pantin visited the office of the Bernard van Leer Foundation in Holland. The Foundation has the good fortune to have been the first overseas Foundation to give financial support to Servol. Its first grant was made in May 1971 and since that time the two organisations have learned much from each other. During his visit, I asked Gerry when he was going to write another book to bring the Servol story up to date. He replied that pressure of work and ill-health meant that he would not be able to do so. Many people associated with projects supported by the Foundation have heard Gerry speak at seminars, have read his two books on the early days of Servol and other articles he has written, and we all knew that the work, the methodology, the approach and the philosophy deserved to be more widely known. And so it was eventually decided that I would go to Trinidad to spend some time with Servol in order to write the story. It has not been easy to write about Servol. The basic problem is that Servol is an experience, a feeling, a spirit. It is so much more than the sum of its parts that no words on paper could ever do it justice.

Confidence in the ability to achieve

This book is not a manual or a set of recipes; there is no curriculum or syllabus here. That is not because the programmes have no curricula or syllabi. On the contrary, the pre-school teachers' training course, the Adolescent Development Programme and the many vocational courses are all very carefully planned and carried out. But that is not the point – the point is the approach and the philosophy which makes people believe in their own abilities, makes them aware of who and what they are, helps them to make their own choices, gives them confidence in themselves and, therefore, the confidence to help others go through the same processes. Along the way, the approach gives an understanding of society and a desire to serve the community; it enhances understanding of child development, improves parenting practices, and turns young people into responsible adults. By working with and through local communities, it brings people together for common purposes so that eventually whole communities gain confidence in their ability to achieve. It is an approach which gives people hope for the future, an approach which is as valid for industrialised countries as it is for developing ones.

The early years of Servol have been described by Gerry Pantin in two books[1] and that history will not be repeated here. What follows in this book is a description of Servol as it enters its 21st year; told, as far as possible, by the people who are part of Servol: the trainees, the instructors and other staff, parents and other members of the community. Some of what they have said has been taken from Servol reports; the remainder was told to me during the

time I spent with Servol in Trinidad during April and May 1990. The voices of the participants have been included here because they are the ones who can best describe and judge what they are experiencing. Reams of academic surveys could in no way do justice to the programmes which are the subject of this book. The trainees, teachers and staff of Servol, and the parents and members of community boards of education, know a good thing when they experience it. Their judgement and knowledge are worth far more than any set of statistics which could only measure quantities. Where programmes such as this are concerned, it is quality that matters.

A truly indigenous organisation

This book should be seen as the work of an interested observer. Interested because I work for the Bernard van Leer Foundation which has supported Servol for nearly 20 years; interested because I have enormous admiration for the work that Servol is doing and believe very much in its philosophy; and interested because I feel privileged to have been able to share, albeit for such a short time, in the spirit of Servol. The phrase 'grassroots' is tossed around with great frequency by people involved in community development work and it is so overused that I hesitate to describe Servol as a grassroots organisation. But that is just what it is. Rather than importing foreign 'experts', ideas or methodologies and adopting them wholesale, Servol is a truly indigenous organisation, firmly based within its own society. Servol is happy to listen to anyone, wherever they come from, but the organisation works from where the people are and what the people need. If it takes ideas from abroad, then it adapts them in such a manner that they become a part of society.

Despite their many problems, there is a spirit and a *joie de vivre* about Trinidadians that makes the country an exciting place in which to be. This is not just because of the steel bands, the calypsonians, the food and the colours. The people make it exciting and joyful – their humour, their ability and willingness to talk about anything under the sun, their openness, their beauty, their achievements, their very differences make them a delight to be with. One achievement is this very remarkable, and odd, organisation called Servol, an organisation that is helping people find themselves, helping to keep community spirit alive, helping to develop new Caribbean people. It is giving all of us, wherever we are in the world, hope for a better future.

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1 Pantin G., *The Servol Village*. The High/Scope Press, Ypsilanti, Michigan, 1984

2 Pantin G., *A Mole Cricket Called Servol*. Pergamon Press Ltd., Oxford, 1979 and The High/Scope Press, Ypsilanti, Michigan, 1983

3 Pantin G., *The Servol Village*, *op cit*

4 His companion was Wesley Hall, a member of the West Indies cricket team who comes from Barbados and was, in 1970, working in Trinidad with the West Indian Tobacco Company which released him for the last four months of his contract to work with Gerry Pantin. In 1989 he became a Cabinet Minister in the Government of Barbados.

5 Gerry Pantin's first co-workers included women volunteers from Port of Spain and 12 members of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Forces who were 'loaned' to Servol for an indefinite period. They stayed for several years; the last one returned to his regiment in 1979.

6 *Servol through the years 1970-1989*. Servol, Port of Spain, 1989

7 *A community education and development programme in a hostile value environment under an unresponsive government*. Servol, Port of Spain, 1987

8 *Trinidad & Tobago: The Rainbow that is Real*. Tourism Development Authority, Port of Spain, undated

9 Pantin G., *A Mole Cricket Called Servol* and *The Servol Village*, *op cit*

CHAPTER TWO

Tough love

What I do in the steel band and what I do in Servol are based on the same thing. Here we have them aged 16 to 19 and in the band we have the exact same type of person. The music itself calls for discipline. Same thing with welding, you have to have strict rules about what you can or can't do. I like music. The welding gives you a type of music which I enjoy, it has a timing which fits perfectly.[1]

Joe Dixon is one of Servol's longest-serving members of staff. He is one of the senior members of the Renegades steel band, to which he has belonged since he was 15 years old. He is also the welding instructor at the Beetham Life Centre.

You can see the Beetham Life Centre on the way into Port of Spain. Next to a petrol station, right beside the busiest highway in the country, you see the huge letters on the side of the large brick building: 'Servol Life Centre'. On a grass patch, underneath the spindly trees, you might also see the children from the pre-school playing. The 'adults' with them will probably be adolescents, male and female. Some of them are training to work with young

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children but most are young men and women training to be plumbers, carpenters, tailors, car mechanics and so on. That, in a nutshell, is what a Servol Life Centre is about.

An unlikely collection of activities

The Beetham, the first and the largest of Servol's Life Centres, is home to an unlikely collection of activities. Besides housing Servol's offices, the Centre is a place where adolescents are trained in plumbing, car repairs, carpentry, masonry, welding, catering, sewing, tailoring and as electricians, home health aides and child care workers. There is a pre-school for 3 to 5 year olds and a creche for babies, plus medical and dental clinics. Each year, some 250 young people go through a 14-week Adolescent Development Programme (ADP) at the Centre before entering the skills training sections; another 60 or so adults are trained as instructors for ADP courses.

Despite all these training and educational activities, the Beetham manages to cover some 80 per cent of its operating costs through income gained from (very low) fees and the productive activities of those who work and train at the Centre.

How did the Beetham Life Centre come about? What makes it such a vibrant place?

Joe Dixon recalled how he joined Servol in 1973. He was a qualified welder and had worked on the island of St Lucia as well as in Port of Spain. He met Father Gerry Pantin at the company where he was then working and said he wanted to work with him:

> He said, 'Could you work with those guys up Laventille because they are very arrogant and uptight?' He didn't know I was from Laventille. Up there we are so cut off from the rest of the town that we are very sceptical of people coming up and organising things. But I had heard about the work he was doing. So I went to the welding shop and soon I took over as welding instructor. We didn't exactly have the full amount of equipment; we started with a few tools which we had to borrow. We made use of what we had. We started doing jobs, bringing in money, and things started to look up.
>
> The first big job we had was a large government building; we took the contract for plumbing and welding. Father Pantin was the one who spearheaded that but we had to give him the assurance that we were capable of doing the job. After completing a year's course, the trainees were capable and able to go out and get jobs.

In those days we were separated. The plumbing shop in one place, the electrical shop in another and the welding shop yet somewhere else. We decided to come here together as one big family. The government gave us this piece of land where we constructed the building. Everything here, except the roof, was done by the students: the wrought iron, casting the concrete, electrical work, plumbing, everything. And we were training them and they did their exams and got their National Trade Certificates at the same time.

Later, when we started the ADP, we needed more room so we built an extension. When the students started coming from the rest of the Caribbean, we built the Caribbean Life Centre downtown.

I must have trained a thousand students by now, though I haven't kept a record. I always wanted to teach, especially children from this environment. Because these are children from the same place where I grew up, but they didn't make it and I did. Why did I make it? Because I wanted to, and the home is very important. What we are doing here is to judge by attitude, responsibility, punctuality, cooperation with others, attitude towards work. I don't regret one moment I have worked with Servol.

Joe Dixon and his trainees completed building the Beetham Centre in time for it to be officially opened in February 1978. From the start there was interaction between the different departments. Servol was never just a training organisation. From the very first days it operated with what has since been called 'tough love': passing on marketable skills to adolescents, caring for young children in pre-schools, providing medical and dental services where there were none before. But all undertaken with the belief in every person's abilities, old or young, to achieve the best he or she can do, and in the knowledge that there is a cruel wide world out there where the pre-schoolers and the adolescents will one day find themselves.

The centre as parent substitute

As the people working and training at the Beetham learned about one another, it was discovered, quite accidentally, that the Centre 'was taking on the role of a parent substitute in compensating, in some small way, for the defective family life background of many of the trainees. Since these youths were not only learning a skill but were being prepared for life, the "Life Centre" concept emerged. With this came the evolution of a specific Life Centre Curriculum'.[2]

The nub of this curriculum is the ADP. This 14-week programme has evolved over the years and is still evolving. Its origins lie in Gerry Pantin's early

realisation that learning skills is not enough for the young people coming to Servol. They have low achievement records from school; their family life is frequently shattered and many have been subject to physical and/or emotional abuse. Their state of mind is such that, even if they are able to acquire a marketable skill, their attitudes to life and work make them almost unemployable. However, what they lack most is self-esteem and confidence.

'You are worth something'

According to trainees who completed the ADP at the Beetham in April 1990:

> You learn here that you are worth something. The course helps you to learn who you are, to control yourself, your emotions, especially anger, resentment, sex. Everybody is good; you have to get it out of them.
>
> Here you can talk to the instructors; in school they don't have the time to talk to you. A teacher is not necessarily only supposed to teach, writing on a board, not just maths or English, but about life. You teach a child about life. I might be fast in speaking; you might be fast in writing; that doesn't necessarily mean I am better than you. They look not at what you are but at what you could be. They don't look right now, but they look ahead at what you could be later on in life.

Two weeks later, a new group of 84 adolescents between the ages of 16 and 19 started their ADP course. On the first morning they sat in rows in a hot, noisy room, unsure of themselves, unsure of what was going to hit them over the next few months. After an introduction by their future instructors, graduates of the previous course spoke to them. They told the new trainees what to expect: that the programme is hard, that they were expected to be punctual and reliable, and that 'you should take your time here seriously'. One girl told the group what the ADP had done for her:

> My father is an alcoholic; my mother was always crying. I was ashamed of them, but I want to make them proud of me and I want to love them. My instructors helped me to understand why a person drinks and what it does. When I failed the Common Entrance I knew I was a failure. But when I came here I knew I was a success. And now my father is drinking less and every Wednesday and Friday he goes to Alcoholics Anonymous and I give him my support and my love. And my mother and I are inseparable. That is the motivation.

Gerry Pantin explained to the new trainees that in the next 14 weeks:

> We are going to witness a miracle. We have learned that buried deep down in everyone is a very beautiful person. Each negative experience from the time we are babies builds a wall around that beautiful person. We in Servol are simply expert masons; we help you to chip away the walls and by the end of three and a half months you find the beautiful person who has been there since you were born, and for the first time in your life you learn to love yourself. Welcome to the house of miracles, not miracles that we work, miracles that you work.

The SPICES curriculum

The ADP course is based on the SPICES curriculum aimed at the development of the whole person. SPICES stands for Spiritual, Physical, Intellectual, Creative, Emotional and Social. The aim is to help the adolescents overcome the major characteristics which Servol has found in them during its years of experience: low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, need for love and attention, need for security, lack of self-discipline. It is achieved in an atmosphere of guidance and discipline tempered with love. This is a tough love which insists that trainees abide by strict rules which have been worked out by trainees and staff together over the years. In an environment that nurtures the adolescents and provides many oportunities for self-development, Servol nevertheless insists on punctuality, reliability, cleanliness, neatness and discipline in all aspects of the adolescents' lives.

During the 14 weeks the trainees are exposed to facts, experiences and emotions that many have never before encountered. Two major aspects of the course are self-awareness and parenting. An ADP graduate explained:

> You are able to express yourself more freely, talk about how you feel, what is inside you. I learned public speaking and drama and that was something I never did before. I never knew I could write. I wrote a drama and I never knew I had it in me. I am creating something.

Another graduate said:

> I know how to apply for a job now. I went for a job at Christmas and I was so nervous, I didn't get it. But if I apply now I'll get it, I know, because I am confident.

Another saw the parenting programme as the best part of the ADP.

> It helped me a lot. I had problems with my mum. I used to answer her back, but now we can discuss things with one another, feelings and things. I used to feel she was taking over too much of my life. She

had made her mistakes and she is supposed to leave me to make my mistakes. But since I came to Servol I know I really love my mother and all she wanted is the best for me. I will be a better parent in the future.

Parenting programme

The parenting programme was introduced into the ADP about six years ago when Servol realised that many of the adolescents missed out on 'normal' family life. The programme begins in the seventh week of the ADP when trainees are beginning to feel more comfortable with themselves and with each other, and builds on the health programme. Basic hygiene and biology are taught from the start, and the adolescents are taught how their bodies work, basic reproduction, and aspects of child development.

'These kids are streetwise,' said Marilyn Stollmeyer who teaches the parenting programme, 'but they honestly and truly don't know what really goes on inside their bodies.' Using a mixture of visual aids, guest speakers, visits, lectures and discussions, the programme covers conception, birth, breastfeeding, abortion, contraception, rape, alcoholism, drugs and venereal diseases as well as common myths.

The groups are mixed, and one aim is to show boys that they are responsible in sexual relationships; that the issues under discussion are not matters which concern only women.

'Some of the girls already have one or two babies; the boys don't usually acknowledge their fatherhood,' said Marilyn Stollmeyer 'and we have to handle it carefully so as not to make them feel guilty, but to help them understand what is involved. The talks and visual aids open them up and their questions are based on real life. We can't take them out of their situation; we just have to support them. They are going home to abuse, sexual or otherwise, to rape, incest, alcoholic parents, drugs.

'They go into the creche and work with the children there and we have competitions. We take a six month old and a two year old and the trainees amuse them – the competition is to see who can stimulate the children most. We want them to understand how much responsibility you have with a baby. We try to deter them from teenage births and hope they realise that when the time comes to have children there is so much to look forward to.'

Of the 80 or so adolescents who join the ADP course at Beetham three times a year, not more than four or five drop out, and that is usually for financial reasons. Drugs are rare at the Beetham and a trainee found using drugs will

be referred to counselling and a place will be kept open for him or her on a subsequent course.

Bernadette John, coordinator of the ADP at Beetham, acknowledged that 'it's not easy being a teenager now; it has got a lot harder. There is a lot of pressure being placed on them; they have too much responsibility on their shoulders: to achieve, to help their families, looking after younger brothers and sisters, having to work at evenings and weekends. They get frustrated because their parents set goals for them that the kids can't accept. And yet we demand a lot from them here; they have to be punctual, neat, tidy, attend regularly. We have to do that because later they will have to face the rat race outside.'

Special children

Every ADP course includes at least one or two handicapped teenagers. Some may be physically handicapped; others will be autistic or mentally retarded. Servol calls them 'special children' and they have their own, very special, Life Centre in Laventille, Port of Spain. The Sunshine Hill Life Centre opened in 1978 and was built by Servol trainees. It includes six classes for mentally retarded children of various levels, as well as a pre-vocational course where teenagers do craftwork and practise social and housekeeping skills. Whenever possible, these teenagers continue on to the ADP and skills training courses at the Beetham and other Life Centres. 'The ADP group handles these special children very well' said Bernadette John, 'and the special children improve considerably.'

Until 1987, Servol ran just four Life Centres: Beetham, Sunshine Hill, the Caribbean Life Centre and Forres Park. The Caribbean Life Centre is in downtown Port of Spain and is the base for pre-school teacher training. Forres Park is in the centre of the island of Trinidad. Opened in 1983, it was built by Servol out of 'an old mule pen and two acres of surrounding bush'.[3] The Forres Park Life Centre was the culmination of six years of effort by Servol to reach out from Port of Spain and work with different types of communities. Not only is this a rural area, but most of the population is of East Indian origin, whereas the majority of Servol's workers and trainees in Port of Spain were, and are, of African origin. The Forres Park Life Centre, originally planned as an agricultural training centre, now has courses in some eight different skills to cater to the needs of the local communities. The catchment area includes nearby villages and San Fernando, Trinidad's second largest city, which is 11 kilometres away. Trainees on the ADP and skills training courses at Forres Park travel up to 35 km twice a day to obtain training they cannot find elsewhere.

Instruments in nation building

When Forres Park was opened in March 1983, Senator C.A. Jacelon, Minister in the Ministry of Finance and Planning, referred to the 'complex of buildings which incorporates, *inter alia*, a day nursery and nursery school; workshops for the teaching of plumbing, carpentry, masonry, electrical installation and auto mechanics; training rooms for catering and sewing; a dental clinic and an agricultural complex of family farms. The appearance of these facilities seems to me to belie their importance as instruments in nation building in Trinidad and Tobago.'[4]

It was to be four years until the next Life Centre was established, and then it was not a Servol Life Centre but a Community Life Centre.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1 Except where otherwise indicated, the quotations in this chapter are taken from conversations held in Trinidad during April and May 1990.

2 *Servol through the years 1970-1989*, Servol, Port of Spain, 1989

3 *Servol News*, Vol 1 No 12, September 1983

4 *Ibid*

A positive attitude to life

We needed to move from the temple because the Hindus are very orthodox and eating meat is prohibited in their compound. The programme is multicultural; that wasn't a problem. The problem was that people would come with their lunches and there would be meat. Servol is unique in that it was started by a Catholic priest and was initially seen as Christian-oriented and then you come to a Community Life Centre in a Hindu temple. Religious bodies were sceptical; there's no two ways about that. It was my job, as Pundit of the temple, to inform people that it is not religious, it is not sectoral, it is for everyone. Not everyone has been persuaded; there are still religious bodies claiming that Servol is Christian-oriented. I am trying in my own way to bridge that gap with one of the major Hindu bodies. The owner of this building is Moslem and that also says a lot.[1]

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Harripersad Panday is the Coordinator of the El Socorro Regional Life Centre. El Socorro is a bustling town some 10 km from Port of Spain on the edge of Trinidad's 'sugar belt'. The Centre he is running is one of 21 new Life Centres which had been established by May 1990 as part of a programme initiated with the Ministry of Education.

At the general election held in December 1986, the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) scored a landslide victory over the People's National Movement (PNM) which had been in power for 30 years. While the PNM had given financial support to Servol over the years, the new NAR government asked the organisation's cooperation in the dissemination of Servol programmes throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Developmental birthright

Servol agreed to act as an agent for the government but insisted that the programmes (to set up new Life Centres and new pre-schools) be run along the lines it had tried and tested throughout the previous 16 years. The programmes were to be in the non-formal sector; they were not to be imposed but, on the contrary, they were to be run by the communities rather than by Servol or by the government. As Servol put it towards the end of 1987:

> We were certainly not going to sell our developmental birthright acquired through 16 years of hard experience for a mess of pottage in the shape of quick fixes and impressive statistics. We were just as eager as [the government] to get something done, only, it had to be done well.[2]

Advertisements appeared in newspapers in January 1987 inviting 'any community group interested in having Life Centres for Adolescent Development Programmes established in its area' to submit applications to the Ministry of Education. Such groups had to 'be able to provide a simple, physical structure in which this programme may be started.' The same advertisement invited people to apply for training as instructors on the ADP courses. In February, a meeting was held for representatives of communities. In April, 142 prospective instructors were interviewed and 14 of them began training. In September, the first new Community Life Centres were opened, staffed by instructors trained at the Beetham.

One of the first Community Life Centres was in El Socorro and was housed in the Hindu temple. Harripersad Panday explained:

> I was the Pundit of the temple, the Hindu priest in charge. I wanted to serve the youth of this area because I knew what the drugs were doing; they were rampant. This area was called Coke City.

We did three terms of ADP in the temple. There were people from all religions; this is a very mixed area. It is more East Indian than anything else. That is because of its proximity to agricultural land and 90 per cent of the people who do agriculture in the country are East Indians. There are some East Indians who are Christians – Roman Catholic and Presbyterians – but many are Moslem or Hindu. It is really very mixed, multi-religious, multiracial, all sorts of things. In some Life Centres, the people in the areas are predominantly negroes; in some places mostly East Indians; it depends on the area.

Regional Life Centres

In December 1988, Pundit Panday found premises for a Regional Life Centre. The need for such centres had quickly become apparent. With plans to open some 40 Community Life Centres around the country, each offering the ADP course three times a year, the existing skills training centres at Beetham in Port of Spain and at Forres Park in the centre of the country would obviously not be able to absorb all the adolescents wanting skills training. The objective of Regional Life Centres is thus to offer skills training, usually alongside ADP courses, in various parts of the country.

The El Socorro Regional Life Centre is housed in a former nightclub. The former owner had run his drugs business from the building and had been shot dead. His mother, who inherited the building, wanted it to be used for any purpose that would help young people.

Six different skills are being taught at El Socorro: beauty culture, refrigeration/air conditioning, tailoring, small appliance repair, electronics and home nursing. Of the 50 vocational trainees who began in March 1989, 25 graduated in April 1990. Only five of the remaining 25 could be called drop-outs; three other students became pregnant (one of whom returned after having her baby); and two migrated with their families. The others had already found jobs. Pundit Panday was delighted with the outcomes of the Regional Life Centre's first year:

> Out of the 25 graduates, we have been able to get permanent employment for 12. That for me is really fantastic in a place where you are talking about unemployment. In the beauty culture department, we sent them on job training for the last three months. They were so good that the owners of the salons kept every one of them. All the guys in the air conditioning/refrigeration department got jobs because the level and the standard were extremely high.
>
> Employers don't need a lot of persuasion to take trainees on placements. The ADP is the key to the programme. The trades are fine

but if you don't have a good attitude towards the trade you don't have a good attitude towards life and people around you and then you will not behave as you should behave. That is what the employers look at. A person who is willing to work and learn at the same time, gives out as much as he can. Any employer would agree to a person like that.

Our major problem is the small appliance repair department because it is an innovation. In a recession people do not throw away their irons or blenders or fans any more; people try to get them repaired. So in an economic recession appliance repairs, refrigeration department, even electronics, are going to make money because people are trying to spend as little as they can. The people in small appliances are hoping to get together as a group and open their own shop and I am helping them with that. Together with the kids from the refrigeration class, they will start their own cooperative. I'm looking for a place for them now and hope they can start in the next few months.

After ADP they go into the trade departments. With an intake every four months there are three groups of trainees at different stages at any one time. After eight or nine months they go out on job training, so it is a continuous cycle.

There was scepticism in the beginning and now there are 137 trainees and we are over capacity. We also have to cater for the other small Life Centres in the area. The Beetham and Forres Park act as regional centres. If somebody at Beetham wants to do beauty culture they could do it here and vice versa with other skills.

Of 25 in ADP you might get two wanting to do child care and as many as five wanting to do home nursing; to train as home health aides. This is because of what they are exposed to in the ADP.

Even when they have left the ADP the process doesn't stop. We use Friday as a very relaxed day so that we can get productivity out of it. When we started Fridays were terrible. To change the mentality of a 16 to 19 year old to be productive is not an easy task. In the morning a volunteer comes in and teaches an additional skill or craft, we do batik and tie-and-dye. Then we have a rap session, we talk about drugs, about family planning, about parenting, anything of the sort. After lunch, every other Friday we have interdepartmental sports. We have got to innovate, try things; this formula came up and it works well.

Agricultural training

Each Community and Regional Life Centre is different, reflecting the area where it is located, the background of the trainees, and also the interests and personalities of the staff. St Andrews Regional Life Centre is in Sangre Grande, a town some 40 km to the east of El Socorro, with a population of 23,000 which depends on small-scale agriculture and service industries. There are no factories or major industries in the area and the unemployment rate is around 20 per cent. The Regional Life Centre is housed in a former convent school; the chapel on the ground floor is still used by the local parishioners. Opened in January 1988 as a Community Life Centre, it became a Regional Life Centre in September 1989 and, as well as an ADP course, it offers training in five skills.

One of the objectives at St Andrew's is to reawaken an interest in agriculture and encourage people to use their own gardens productively. According to Paul Bousignac, the Coordinator, many people in the area – particularly those of African origin whose culture relates cultivation of land with their ancestors' slavery – see agriculture as degrading. A piece of land beside the building has been divided into small plots and each group of trainees has to spend some hours each week cultivating 'their' plot.

'We had to make this compulsory; they didn't want to do it,' said Paul Bousignac, 'but when the first crops were ready and we let them take their tomatoes and lettuces home, they began to see things differently. Subsequent crops go to the catering department and we are going to clear another piece of land and grow more vegetables.'

ADP instructors

The key to the vocational training is, obviously, the ADP. And the key to the ADP are the instructors. Before 1987, Servol had run experimental training programmes for over 180 potential leaders from Trinidad and Tobago and other Caribbean territories. This experience was put to good use from April 1987 when the first set of ADP instructors for the new Community Life Centres were trained. Since then, the training programme has developed but the methodology has remained essentially the same. The training period for ADP instructors is identical to the length of an ADP course – 14 weeks. Furthermore, they run concurrently. On the first day of the new ADP at Beetham Life Centre in May 1990, alongside the 84 adolescents were 20 adults who would go through the same activities, lectures, visits, experiences.

The reason, as Gerry Pantin explained to the trainee instructors, is that 'we regard the Servol training course as an experience, and not just a thing in which you learn something in your head.' Servol's training officer, Katy

Skills offered at Life Centres

air conditioning
auto air conditioning
auto electrical
auto mechanics
auto transmission
beauty culture
catering
child care
electrical installation
electronics
garment construction
general auto repair/ maintenance
guest house aide
home health aide
industrial sewing
masonry
plumbing
printing
sewing
small applicance repairs
straightening & painting
tailoring
tyre alignment/balancing
vehicle upholstering

Mungo, told the group that, contrary to most other training programmes, the aim is 'to de-emphasise the intellectual. Here, every single day, you are going to have the theory and the practice combined. Lectures, films, you will participate in discussions and just before or after you will be sitting in a class, looking at the trainees, looking at somebody teaching them, listening with them.'

For the first three weeks, the trainee instructors are required to sit, to observe and to remain silent. The aim of this period is to give them time to form their own impressions of the philosophy and concept of Servol and the ADP; it also helps them to understand some possible frustrations of students who may often find themselves being talked at and unable to respond.

No specific educational qualifications are required of ADP instructors and the educational level ranges from basic elementary school to university graduates. Some have training or teaching experience; many do not and have no previous experience working with young people. Gerry Pantin says that they are looking for people who 'have not been too hurt or too damaged by their background so as to close them off from genuinely helping another person'.

Skills instructors

The skills instructors' training, however, is much more limited and basically comprises an introduction to the Servol philosophy. Gerry Pantin explained it thus:

> When you are imparting a skill, once the person is good with his technical skill, the trainee literally accepts him, even if the fellow loses his temper. If he shouts, the trainee will put up with that because he feels that fellow is teaching him something important. And as we explain to the trainees, in a way we are glad our instructors are not perfect, because if we had a group of very perfect instructors and we are training you for life and then you have to go out there and make that transition and get a job, you will not find people who will tell you: 'will you please pass the shovel'. No, they say: 'take that so-and-so shovel and get the hell out of here'. How are you going to cope with that? So in a sense it is good I think, to be exposed to a rather average type of instructor who is still dedicated, who is still a fatherly type of person, but not anything as giving and as caring as the ADP instructors. It is a good transition. I wouldn't want it otherwise or else the transition from Servol to the outside world would be too drastic.

Community Boards of Education

Each of the Community Life Centres and Regional Life Centres is run by a Community Board of Education with its own constitution. Members of Boards, all volunteers, are responsible for policy and for the overall management of the Life Centre and also for fundraising. Board members are drawn from as wide a spectrum as possible of the local community. Eventually the Community and Regional Life Centres should be completely autonomous but, for the moment, they are under the wing of the Ministry of Education/Servol programme and their activities are overseen and coordinated by Field Officers who visit the Centres regularly and report back to Servol weekly.

As with so much of Servol, this is a system that has evolved in the light of experience. The sudden surge in the size of the programme revealed weak points and by mid-1988, Servol realised that the whole operation needed tightening. It was seen that:

> The type of disciplined atmosphere which is congenial to the large Servol Centres is not applicable to small Centres in far-off villages. Our Field Officers have brought back very interesting reports of the efforts of teachers and instructors to create an atmosphere conducive to learning and development of small children and adolescents, which run the gamut from an almost para-military set-up to a delightfully permissive chaotic situation. We have accepted the experimentation of the teachers and instructors as part of the development of a new project; it is time, however, for us to lay down clearer and more well defined parameters which will guide the

emergent teachers and instructors towards a realistic ideal, as well as to help those already in the field to correct deviations which have obviously interfered with the learning process of the children concerned.

Needless to say, we will always be prepared to allow individual centres a certain freedom to develop in their own way in response to the cultural signals emitted from the community in question; the last thing we want is a rigid stereotyped mould into which each centre must fit. On the other hand it is necessary in a project of this type to impose certain well-defined limits on inexperienced teachers and instructors who are relatively new in the instructional profession.[3]

Two years later, in April 1990, a meeting of Field Officers discussed certain problematic Life Centres. The problems centred mainly on inactive Boards. According to Gerard D'Abreau, Chief Field Officer and Coordinator of the ADP, a good Board holds regular, meaningful meetings; has members who regularly visit the Life Centre and participate in teaching crafts; takes fundraising initiatives; and manages the Centre in a way that supports the instructors (for example, by handling finances and salaries). When a Board is unable to do most or all of these things, tough decisions have to be made. Life Centres have been closed because Boards have become inoperative and no community members have come forward to take on the task. In other cases, Life Centres have closed because it was realised that the population of the area was too small to sustain it: the feeder population needs to be able to supply around 25 adolescents aged 16 to 19 three times a year.

Educational standards

Servol's adolescent training programmes are for teenagers aged 16 to 19 and a trainee will only be accepted on a skills training course if he or she has successfully completed the ADP course. In the early years, many of the trainees had not completed primary school. Such youngsters are rare nowadays and most have finished junior high school (three years secondary education) while some have even completed senior high school (five years).

Despite their years of schooling, many of the 16 to 19 year olds coming to Servol are functionally illiterate. Basic literacy therefore forms an important part of the ADP.

Some of the teenagers who do the ADP don't quite make it and may be asked to repeat. Servol doesn't use the word 'failure' and no one fails on the ADP. The Field Officers explained that the adolescents sometimes volunteer to repeat because they reckon they had not done as well as they could have. In fact, many of them would love to repeat the course if given the opportunity:

'It is the way they are treated, the instructors treat them like parents so it becomes a kind of replacement family.'

High school students

The ADP approach developed from experience with youngsters in the poorest areas of Port of Spain; it is now recognised as relevant for all teenagers. In 1989 Servol agreed to accept a small number of students from senior high schools and from what are known in Trinidad as the 'prestige schools'. These are the original secondary schools of the country, run by religious orders and with academic standards which measure up to the best in Europe or the USA. Working with the Guidance Officers at the Ministry of Education, students who are being disruptive in their schools and in danger of being expelled, are invited to participate in the ADP. Their participation must be voluntary and their parents/guardians must agree. After the ADP they may choose to return to their schools, to go to another school, or to continue with Servol in one of the skills training departments.

Addressing a group of nine prospective ADP students and their parents in May 1990, the Minister of Education told them: 'We are only doing this because we care for you. We could have expelled you or suspended you. We will give you help and support, whatever you need, so long as you stick to it. If you go to Servol and you fail, you have to take the consequences.' In response to a comment from a parent that similar programmes should be included in all schools, the Minister said that he was intending to introduce it into teacher training colleges and into in-service training for teachers.

Servol is doing its part by inviting guidance officers and teachers to visit the Life Centres and talk to trainees. This activity is seen as 'a wedge under the door,' according to Training Officer, Reynold Crepin, who also visits secondary schools to explain to teachers the philosophy and principles of the ADP.

Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme

So keen is the government to train young people for gainful employment that it set up the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP). Funded by the World Bank, it is run by a committee comprising the Ministries of Youth, Sport, Culture and Creative Arts; Community Development; and Labour. The aim was to train 20,000 unemployed youths between the ages of 15 and 25 in 1988, the first year of operation.

The programme quickly ran into problems of access to suitable premises and a lack of trained instructors. YTEPP was originally conceived as including an attitudinal development aspect and Servol undertook to train instructors.

However, it was subsequently discovered that the attitudinal training had been reduced to a two-hour weekly session and was not obligatory. The emphasis of those running YTEPP was firmly on vocational training and the development of attitudes to work was so downgraded as to make a nonsense of it. Gerry Pantin's views are based on 20 years of experience and he is convinced that 'once you get the correct attitudes, things tend to fall into place because they are resources the youngsters can draw on; they can go and find jobs, they can get skill training in different places. But you can't get the attitudes except at a programme like the ADP. That achieves the change.'

Shaping their tomorrow

That kind of change was achieved by the 41 adolescents who, in April 1990, completed the first ever ADP to be held at the Chaguanas Community Life Centre. By the time of their graduation ceremony, attended by their parents and other members of the community, 36 had found places on skills training courses and the other five would repeat the ADP. One graduate told the audience: 'I know where I am; I know where I am heading; I have a positive attitude to life. I can now relate to the outside world.' Another asked parents: 'to help us to be the best that we can be. We need your respect and courtesy; we need to bridge that communications gap.'

And the community? A local man, not a member of the Board and not even a parent of one of the students, stood up; he had volunteered to help teach one of the courses. He was proud to witness the camaraderie and considered his voluntary work as time and effort well spent: 'these young people are taking skills and attitudes into the world. We are part of shaping their tomorrow.'

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1 Except where otherwise indicated, the quotations in this chapter are taken from conversations held in Trinidad during April and May 1990.

2 *Modifications and development of the programme in response to positive initiatives from a new government*. Servol, Port of Spain, 1987

3 *Servol Nationwide Programme, Work plan August 1988-July 1989*. Servol, Port of Spain, 1988

CHAPTER FOUR

'You get twice as much as you put in'

After I left school I trained at the Caribbean Life Centre. I was one of the first set, the guinea pigs. Then I worked in the demonstration nursery there for six years. You had to be very disciplined, you were always under observing eyes. Then in 1987 I did the Field Officers' training programme. I look after pre-schools in the central part of Trinidad where the community is predominantly Hindu and Moslem. It was quite a culture shock for me, I didn't know the area. I'm a town girl and this is an agricultural area. It was like learning to crawl again before you can walk. It's a challenge being a Field Officer; you have to be able to plan effectively, but you also have to be flexible, but I love it all the same.[1]

Charlene Phillip is one of the 10 Field Officers who were working in the Ministry of Education/Servol early childhood programme in May 1990. When the new government of Trinidad and Tobago asked Servol at the end of 1986 to cooperate in the dissemination of programmes throughout the country (see previous chapter), the organisation was ready for the challenge. It already had a pre-school teacher training programme; it had developed an indigenous curriculum; it had experience in working with parents and

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communities; and it had set up several pre-schools during its previous 16 years of existence.

Why pre-schools? Servol realised during its early years that the only thing which seemed to unite people in a scattered, unmotivated community was their concern for the education of their small children. Once a pre-school is set up it then becomes 'a sort of listening device through which you can listen attentively to what the people tell you about themselves, their area, their leaders, their hopes, their disappointments, and their plans for the future.'[2]

The first pre-schools established by Servol were in Laventille, Port of Spain, in the early 1970s, shortly to be followed by some in rural areas in the central part of the country. The need, in fact, was for training of pre-school teachers and Servol discovered early on that it is possible to train young women with few or no academic qualifications and turn them into outstanding teachers and community promoters. Pre-schools were always seen as facilities that must be 'of' the community and integrated into community life; they must not be services provided and managed from outside.

The Caribbean Life Centre

In 1981, Servol was offered a former school in the heart of Port of Spain which it turned into the Caribbean Life Centre (CLC). The CLC is a training centre for early childhood educators and a hostel for students from further parts of Trinidad and other islands. It also houses a pre-school (the demonstration nursery) for children from the immediate locality.

The CLC, as its name implies, exists to serve other territories in the Caribbean as well as Trinidad and Tobago. When Charlene Phillip started her course she was one of 25 students of whom 18 were from Trinidad and Tobago and the remaining seven were from other parts of the Caribbean. By the end of the academic year 1989-1990, a total of 468 early childhood educators had been trained. Of these, 397 have been trained at the CLC, of whom 77 are from other Caribbean territories. The remainder have been trained locally.

One of the CLC's objectives was to develop an indigenous early childhood curriculum for three and four year olds. This would emphasise language development, the development of good work habits and a healthy self-concept – in short, an extension of the ideal home setting. What has developed is the SPICES curriculum, which is now used in all of Servol's programmes. The methodology used is referred to by participants as the playway method. This emphasises that small children learn through play and thus acquire the skills that they will need in the future. An active method of learning involving creativity and discovery, it utilises children's natural curiosity, as opposed to the more traditional passive method of teaching.

The pre-school teacher training course was (and remains) three years: one year full-time at the CLC and two years supervised internship in pre-schools. The only academic qualification required of applicants is a pass in English at the Ordinary level of the Caribbean Examination Certificate (CXC). An in-service training course has also been organised from the start. This consists of weekly two-hour sessions plus homework over a nine month period.

Caribbean Life Centre Training Programmes 1981 - 1990

	total	from Trinidad & Tobago	from Caribbean, trained at CLC	from Caribbean, trained locally
early childhood educators 1981-1990	468	320	77	71
field officers 1981-1990	64	10	6	48

Expansion of early childhood programme

The ambitious programme to expand pre-schooling throughout Trinidad and Tobago was launched in mid-January 1987 when advertisements appeared in newspapers announcing the Ministry of Education's intention to establish new community pre-school centres. As with the Life Centres programme, communities would need to provide a simple physical structure for the pre-school. They were also asked to submit the names of four persons, of whom two would be selected for training as pre-school teachers. Applications were to be in by 26 January. By 16 February, 35 prospective teachers had been interviewed, selected and began their training course.

In September 1987, 21 new pre-schools opened, all managed by Community Boards of Education, all staffed by teachers trained at the CLC, and all furnished with tables, chairs, cupboards, shelves and other equipment manufactured in the workshops of Servol's Life Centres.

Also in September, a new intake of 60 students began full-time training at the CLC while 37 Boards of Education prepared their schools for the following September. By September 1990, there were 155 schools participating in the Ministry of Education/Servol Early Childhood Programme throughout

Trinidad and Tobago. These included 52 pre-schools which were located in community centres and, until then, had been under the aegis of the pre-school unit at the Ministry of Education.

Early Childhood Centres and training under the Ministry of Education/Servol programme 1987-1990

	centres	teachers trained	field officers	children involved
September 1987	21	35	3	618
September 1988	58	95	6	1,752
September 1989	85	149	9	2,535
September 1990	155	314	15	4,763

The final decision to bring these 'Ministry schools' into the programme was taken in early 1990 following an evaluation of the first three years of the programme. This covered 105 schools and the general conclusion was that:

> The effect on the children concerned appears to be consistently positive, with a carry-over effect at least as far as the first year in primary school. The curriculum and teaching methods are more realistically attuned to the emotional, physical and psychological growth of the pre-school child than the traditional rigid and formal methods, and the involvement of the community in the school itself contributes to the child's sense of his environment. The programme itself is one well adapted to Trinidad and Tobago's needs and stage of social development.[3]

The Caribbean programme

Similarly favourable reports have been made about the Caribbean programme. Between 1981 and 1990, 77 pre-school teachers from 15 other Caribbean territories were trained at the CLC. An evaluation of the programme, which looked at the work of 46 students in 11 islands, was carried out in 1987[4]. The conclusions were generally positive: the majority of student

interns were playing an effective role in their national training programmes and the SPICES curriculum was spreading rapidly throughout the Caribbean; parental involvement was high and there appeared to be both a need and a desire for more parent education; the involvement of immediate communities was less than it could have been, although government support for early childhood programmes was generally good. The effect on children was, of course, difficult to assess and almost impossible to separate from the usual developmental gains made by children of that age. Nevertheless, the report noted:

> There was, however, sufficient evidence gathered through interviews – that children who moved from another school to a Servol school became more interested in attending school and that children from the same family who went through the Servol pre-school training, adjusted better to primary school than their siblings that had not – to come to the cautious conclusion that the effect on students of the Servol programme has been favourable.
>
> Particularly significant in this regard, was the repeated parental comment throughout all the islands, on the improved socialisation skills of the children and, quite without any sort of prompting, the repetition in country after country, that the child had become more friendly, outgoing and 'would now speak to everybody about anything'.[5]

The evaluation report made a number of recommendations, one of which was that more attention needed to be given to supervising the interns: 'While it is not surprising statistically, that from a group of 46 students being evaluated, four or five would prove disappointing, as resources are so limited, it is a shame to lose even those few who started out with such great promise.' The issue has indeed received attention since then. In addition to local supervision, trainers from the CLC now visit interns twice each year; trainees are encouraged to meet and work together in their home islands; and in 1988 the CLC instituted an annual regional symposium for trainers, coordinators and Field Officers throughout the region.

Administering and supervising such a widely dispersed and rapidly expanding programme would give the most experienced manager a headache. Yet the small staff at the CLC take it all in their stride. Key to the smooth running of the programme are the trainers and the Field Officers. Just six people undertake the training at the CLC. According to Sister Roberta, who is the coordinator of the CLC:

> Trainers have many responsibilities. Most of the staff here can put their hand to any aspect of the training; they have to work hard. They

are responsible for the full-time trainees, the part-time trainees, and the first and second year interns who are visited regularly in the field and who attend workshops at CLC twice a month.

We are also responsible for the continuing development of the Field Officers, for the interns up the islands and for facilitating meetings for the Coordinators. The annual Caribbean Coordinators' Symposium, which we started a few years ago, has done a lot in bringing together those who influence early childhood in the region, and in helping us to support one another, to share and to become a little bolder. I have found that governments in the Caribbean are showing a lot more awareness of early childhood and some are now beginning to employ Field Officers/Junior Supervisors to assist the overburdened Coordinators. This is because Coordinators are taking the lead from one another and are demanding a little bit more.

'The glue which holds the programme together'

Field Officers were described in a CLC Annual Report[6] as 'the glue which holds the programme together'. Sister Roberta sees them as 'the bearers of the message and the backbone of the programme. Usually they spend far more time than their job descriptions would demand in the field and far more energy on their jobs.'

By September 1980, there were 17 Field Officers operating in Trinidad and Tobago of whom 11 are in charge of one geographical zone each (10 in Trinidad plus one covering Tobago). The other six run training programmes in four locations outside Port of Spain aimed particularly at staff of the 52 pre-schools formerly under the supervision of the Ministry of Education Pre-School Unit, now disbanded.

The 'zonal' Field Officers visit schools in the Ministry of Education/Servol programme, supervising interns in their second and third years of training. Their tasks are to support and encourage the teachers and reinforce and monitor their performance. This includes all aspects of the teacher's work, inside and outside the classroom, and particularly the work with parents, Boards of Education and the wider community. All the Field Officers have been pre-school teachers; several of them, like Charlene Phillip, were trained by Servol at the CLC.

Field Officers make monthly reports to the CLC and each year they write reports on the pre-schools and communities they have been visiting. Angela Alexander covers an area in the south of Trinidad. She has been associated with Servol from the very beginning, is a trained pre-school teacher and has done a rural development course. She wrote of her first year as a Field Officer:

I made daily visits to each community and soon discovered that the communities did not know much about what pre-school education entailed. The teachers were inexperienced, the education boards had various views of their role and function within the school community. It was at this juncture I realised that I had taken on a job that would require all my energies in order to accomplish the goals which I had established. Each area was unique and had to be handled differently.

Reaching out to parents

Field Officer Gillian Slocum's training includes a Montessori course and the CIC course. She worked in a private nursery for three years but came back to Servol to be a Field Officer 'because I missed the work and the people and here you can reach out to so many people and parents'. Her schools are in Port of Spain and in 1989 she reported on the parent and community aspects of the programme:

> From the feedback I have received from my teachers this aspect of the programme seems to be the most difficult in terms of participation. From past experiences however, we have discovered that consistency and proper organisation enhances the level of participation in their programmes.

The rewards, however, are many. Cynthia Celestin worked as a secondary school teacher in her home island of St Lucia. Having taken a Montessori course in Trinidad, she became a Servol Field Officer in 1988. She reflected in her annual report on the children attending the pre-schools she had been visiting for the last year:

> When I think back to the early days of tears and insecurity, I wonder, are these the same children? Surely I must be mistaken. In every Centre I can identify at least two children who were crying, screaming and sobbing for a whole week, in some cases it was longer. I now look at these same children, who have become so secure, so brave, so confident and so independent, and so I vouch for the success of the programme.

Beryl Saunders trained in Europe and was the principal of a model nursery school in San Fernando. She had decided to open her own pre-school when she heard of a Field Officer vacancy with Servol. Now working with pre-schools in the south of Trinidad she commented:

> In some communities one major question being raised is that in our Centres 'children play all day'. As Field Officer I have explained that

> play at this early stage of a child's development is the medium through which a child learns. It is a serious and deeply significant activity for the young children. The focus of play at this age is the core of their whole future. It has been explained that because a child learns through play, he learns willingly and learns much – especially if there is a series of playthings and games. The role of the adult is to plan and supervise the activities, to recognise the teachable moments, and intervene at the appropriate time.

Susana Ferreira covers a zone in the east of Trinidad. At one time she ran her own pre-school, but is happy to be working as a Field Officer:

> I enjoyed running my own school and influencing parents but in this job you can influence 300 parents and I have so much to give. But when I reflect I realise that I am getting so much. You get twice as much as you put in.

'They can do so much more than they think they can'

The trainers at the CLC all have university backgrounds and most have studied and worked in other countries. Marcel de Govia, for example, studied and worked in the USA and Grenada before coming back to her native Trinidad. She finds her work challenging as well as rewarding:

> To see young women coming into a training institution feeling so alone, not having that self-confidence to feel that they can do, and then after a year you see that young person go out there and run a whole school, manage it, set it up. We are certainly laying down some skills, many skills within our women to show them that they can do so much more than they think they can.

In addition to her teaching and supervisory duties, Marcel de Govia is also the community coordinator, meeting new Boards of Education wishing to join the programme. She checks on the three basic needs: the identification of someone to be trained, a site or building for the pre-school, and the financial aspects. Communities make contact following advertisements or from knowing other communities where a pre-school has already been established. Potential trainees are selected in April and begin training the following September.

> Between September and December I visit the new communities with the new trainees to meet with their Boards. We begin to prepare the school for entry into the programme. In all the Boards, it is voluntary. Trainees have to understand that if someone is volunteering their time, it is important for them to get involved and to find out exactly

how they can assist. Although the course is very demanding, we feel there are times when they must make themselves available to participate in Board activities. Because without the Boards and without their support they wouldn't have the backing to establish the early childhood centres.

A lot of pre-schools are in community centres which we use as temporary housing, but the communities need their centres for other kinds of activities. We hope that, as we work more closely with the Ministry of Community Development, annexes can be built on the same sites so that we would be able to have a self-contained pre-school and the community centre can be left to expand its own programme. This is our whole thrust now. The community centres have a conflict of interests because a school is a school, recreation is recreation.

Servol would like to see the pre-schools remain small with a maximum of 30 to 35 children in two classes. One community is now planning a second school because the first one had an enrolment nearing 70. Marcel de Govia explains:

If we are talking about large centres, we have to put in the personnel to make it effective. You are talking about having to have a principal, someone to do the record-keeping, someone to do the books, administrative staff and so on. It gets too much for the teachers themselves to handle. We would like the teacher to perform at all levels. If she is going to be overburdened with administrative work, then the actual teaching in the classroom will suffer.

Community Boards of Education

What kind of people serve on the Community Boards of Education? As everywhere, it tends to be the same people who volunteer for things. Marcel de Govia does not come across too many problems in finding members, but once the Board is established she sees four problematic areas: interpersonal relations, organisational planning, accounting and management.

We are asking them all to function in these four areas but we haven't really equipped them with the know-how. They need the back-up and support and we are looking at ways of giving them this. However problematic the situation may be, we try to redirect their problems and zero back on why it is we have come together. That it is the pre-school we are working towards. In most instances, people in communities can rise above the things that have trapped them for so many years because of the nature of the community where most people have been feeling so alienated or so removed from the urban

settings. It is true that a lot of our rural communities have been neglected for basic needs. But if you have that dedication the people can see themselves developing projects that will bring a certain amount of satisfaction to their communities. This holds across all ethnic lines, all socio-economic lines because that need is there. It is even more helpful when you get teachers who put forward a school that is of a very high standard because it makes them feel that their contribution is worthwhile. That is key, when the teacher works with them.

Some of the communities where the pre-schools are situated are in urban areas, more are in rural areas. The communities are poor with high rates of unemployment and underemployment; poor health facilities; and inadequate supplies of such services as water, electricity and waste disposal. Parents and grandparents often have had little education themselves beyond primary school. A major problem in rural areas is that those children who do well in secondary school or higher education usually leave for the towns and cities of Trinidad and further afield.

Accreditation by Oxford University

The Servol pre-school teacher training programme has had to fight many battles for recognition; too many people believe that a programme designed to help poor children must necessarily be a poor programme. To counter this, the methodology has been much more traditional and didactic than that used for the ADP. In the latter case, Servol was breaking new ground and therefore felt free to experiment. The result is a learning programme based on experience. The early childhood programme, however, could be measured against many other training programmes for teachers of young children and has had to prove itself in the face of opposition and criticism. One of the criticisms is that trainees do not possess the usual academic requirements for entry into other training courses (usually a minimum of five passes at Ordinary level GCE).

Servol had approached the University of the West Indies for accreditation which was refused because of the entry requirements. Following this, it approached Oxford University in England. The University applies a standard approach to evaluating how people themselves assess the work.

Christine Parker, a lecturer at a College of Education in Oxford, visited Trinidad in April 1990 to make a final assessment of trainees on behalf of the Oxford Delegacy (which accredits courses on behalf of the University). According to her, the Delegacy is "more concerned with what comes out at the end than with what goes in at the beginning. It is much more credit to a course if it can turn people out who haven't got the entry qualifications."

During her visit, Christine Parker, as well as visiting final-year interns, worked with the CTC staff and Field Officers, helping them to standardise their methods of assessment.

> They are teaching what is called the language experience approach to acquiring reading and writing. That means that everything the children do is pictured, written up, and there is lots of writing all round the classroom. And the children learn to read basically from what is around them. From that point of view, they would expect every student to be good at display work, putting up pictures, neat clear lettering and so on. And they have certain expectations about personality as well. They are very much into warm approachable teachers.
>
> We are arguing that we want to go on the student's performance in the classroom because some of the students are exceptionally good teachers but very poor on examinations.
>
> The community and parental aspects stagger me. It is unique work they do. I don't know of any other teacher that has to build her own school.
>
> If they can change parental attitudes then they can change the whole standard of education in the country. What this programme is doing is looking at what is needed in the situation and supplying that need in a way that is financially viable and making use of the resources in the community.
>
> I have immense admiration for what the teacher trainers are doing. If they got even half of their students competent that would be a miracle, and in fact they get more than half really functioning well. They have taught them to believe in this principle of education that is child-centred and enables the child to grow. You talk to any of the students, even those that are not necessarily performing very well; they can all tell you how important it is for children to be enabled to play freely, to acquire the concepts and things like this. They have to learn this well because they have to convince the parents that this is a good way of educating. The parents can see how different it is from the formal nursery school where they are sitting down and copy writing all the time.
>
> I certainly have no doubts at all about accrediting the course.

In May 1990, the first Oxford certificates were awarded to 25 pre-school teachers (including seven Field Officers who had to sit their examinations

again for this purpose). A further 33 received Ministry of Education/Servol Certificates and just one received a Certificate of Participation.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. Except where otherwise indicated, the quotations in this chapter are taken from conversations held in Trinidad during April and May 1990.

2. Montrichard R., *Servol Faces the Eighties*. Servol Printing Services, Port of Spain, 1980, p 17.

3. *Evaluation report on Servol's development of non-formal programme of early childhood education and care in high-risk areas*. Personnel Management Services Ltd., Port of Spain, 1990.

4. *Evaluation report on Servol's regional training programme for pre-school teachers*. Personnel Management Services Ltd., Port of Spain, 1987.

5. *ibid*.

6. *Annual Evaluative Report on the Nationwide Early Childhood Education Programme in Trinidad and Tobago covering the period August 1988-July 1989*. Servol, Port of Spain, 1989.

CHAPTER FIVE

They are playing, but they are learning

You start with orientation in September for a month. You come to a course to learn to be an early childhood educator and in that first month there was nothing to do with methods or education. Instead we try to develop ourselves, our personal awareness. We had public speaking, we had drama, we had so many things. I saw after a while that I had a poor concept of myself and through that orientation we were exposed to so much. I remember Father Pantin telling us 'your mind or your brain is a factory where you can manufacture anything; you are capable of manufacturing anything'. I will never forget that statement. Orientation made me think I could do so much; there is so much in me. In a way it conditioned us for the course so that whatever trials or troubles came up we were able to face them.[1]

Carol Sambury is from a village in the south of Trinidad. She has been teaching in the community's pre-school since 1984 and in September 1989 she embarked on her first ever training course at the Caribbean Life Centre (CLC) in Port of Spain.

Orientation

The 'orientation' she describes above is an innovation in the pre-school teachers' course which she and her fellow students were the first to experience. The decision to introduce a four-week orientation period at the beginning of the course was based on Servol's experience with its other programmes, specifically, the Adolescent Development Programme (ADP) at the Life Centres and the accompanying programme to train instructors for the ADP. The Annual Evaluative Report[2] for the Ministry of Education/Servol programme for 1988-1989 noted that Servol's various programmes had fed valuable insights into one another over the years and that experience with the

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adolescents' programmes had led to a decision to incorporate an adaptation of the ADP into the pre-school teacher training programme:

> It is true that we would have to leave out a certain amount of course information to make room for this programme, but it was well worth it if the final product was an educator who had come to terms with herself as a person, with increased self-esteem and a more positive attitude to life.
>
> The truth is, we did not need too much convincing to make the change. The observations of teacher trainers and Field Officers indicated that the most important factor in teacher effectiveness was not knowledge but the personality of the teacher, particularly in so far as the latter appeared to be comfortable with herself, capable of easily forming relationships with children and adults and non-defensive in her attitude to life in general and to the people with whom she worked in particular.

As with the ADP, the basis of the orientation month, and of the pre-school teacher training course, is the SPICES curriculum.

Self development and self awareness

It would be possible to reproduce the syllabus here but 'orientation' is about process, about development and about self-awareness. Instead, let some of the teacher trainees describe what happened to them during those first four weeks.

> We had personal development, public speaking, you could participate in writing something and then coming in front and talking to the class. It was the first few weeks of us coming together so you felt that you didn't know the people. Yet when we started to bring all these things together people just stood up and they had more confidence. The way in which it was done, you felt confident to stand up and talk out. We had drama and spirituality and I thought spirituality was brought across in a very real sense because they didn't focus on any religion. What I got from spirituality was that it means to have a respect for humankind and to see everybody as a person who you are supposed to respect and not to dominate or to say my religious leaning is better than yours. It was really something else. *(Edlin Joseph, Trinidad)*
>
> It helps you to deal not only with the children but with the parents. As teachers you have to have parent meetings, share with the community, meet with boards. The self-awareness programme helps

you to accept yourself, who you are, to accept others, to see others as they are. Sometimes as a human being you tend to want to tell other people what you want them to be, but this opens up an awareness in you that people are who they are and you can live and work with people as they are and help them to realise their best selves. (*Grace Phillips, Jamaica*)

Other training courses go straight into it; you're never given a chance to settle in. It was a foundation. One month was right. (*Verlin Ralph, Antigua*)

In October 1989, a hurricane struck much of the Caribbean, although it missed Trinidad. The home countries of many of the students from other islands were devastated. Cathleen Matthew from Antigua recalled:

If it had not been for that month, we would have gone home when the hurricane struck. We pulled together. If we had not realised our responsibility to the cause to which we are called, we would have gone home. I just wanted to be back with my people to assist them and then you realise that I can help by being here. The people on the course from Trinidad all came to talk to us and helped us.

Despite the many positive aspects of the orientation month, some students found it to be a difficult experience. Sonia Rodd from Grenada explained:

It was real tough. Coming in you expected things to be a bit light, but classes were 8 to 3, sometimes extra classes till 6 or 6.30. And we had to make things we had never made before. Like crafts or soft toys. But afterwards I realised we were being prepared. Without that orientation programme I don't think we could have coped. It was very good; we learned a lot. Building up our confidence especially. Public speaking, personality development, self awareness, drama. When you are not used to such long hours, it can be really strenuous. Enjoyable but strenuous.

Previous experience

A very few of the students who train at the CLC have no teaching experience while the majority have been teaching for between six months and two years. A small number of them have quite considerable experience – between 10 and 15 years – especially those from other Caribbean territories. A few of these students have attended workshops, often run by former Servol trainees. Some, having previously done Servol's in-service course of weekly two-hour sessions, have joined the full-time course at the CLC. One such student is Grace Barnard from the south of Trinidad:

> I found that I did not get what I really wanted from the in-service course. I intend to do this all my life until I get very old. Before I was involved with Servol we had 55 children in one class. It was run by a community group at the community centre. One hundred and ten children for two teachers. Few materials, and by the time you got them to the children the time was up. And it was a whole day, from 8 a.m. to 3.30. It was terrible. When I got home I was just going mad; I had no voice. Then I got involved in Servol and went from 55 to 15 in one class so it was a big difference.

Damaging children as little as possible

Some students with many years of teaching experience found that the course at the CTC was introducing them to entirely new concepts and methods. For example, Laurette Webster had attended workshops in Anguilla:

> Our method was more or less formal, like the primary school. We were trying to help the children along and damaging them as little as possible — we now realise that. When I used to teach I could use some of what I learned from workshops held by students who had returned from Servol but I wasn't able to do it effectively because I didn't really fully understand. In the few months of teaching practice that I have had here I was able to be with the kids and find that they learn a lot more than with the formal method because they enjoy it more, the playway method. With the formal work they get kind of bored, going over the same thing. I have confidence in myself that when I go home the kids will be more interested in learning through this playway method.

Cathleen Matthew, who has been teaching for five years, explained:

> In the playway method the children are really engaged in the activity themselves, they become wrapped up in it, they find solutions to problems with your assistance rather than you sitting down and telling them.

Finding solutions to problems means being creative, as Carol Sambury found:

> You always have to create something with this curriculum. You have to invent a game, a song, a story, something like that. In other countries they have things they can buy in the store; we have to create. Servol says 'don't go to the store to buy something because you need money for that, we want you to create'. Sometimes, when everybody brings back what they have done for an assignment it is great; it is so special, I love to see those great creations.

A sharing method

At the core of everything the pre-school teacher trainees are learning and doing are the parents. Mary Steele is from a small town in the south of Trinidad. Her school opened in 1988 and she did the in-service course. During her year at the CLC, her community is running the school, waiting for her to come back. She defined her job thus:

> Being a pre-school teacher is a sharing method. You as the teacher have your skills but the parents are as equal because if you look around you could find parents to do almost everything – craft, garden work with the children, make soft toys, play music. If you try you can get the parents to come in and do almost everything with you. This is what you are really looking for as an early childhood educator, these exchanges with parents.

The average age of the teacher trainees is 25 but the variation is from 17 to 46. Around 40 per cent of them have children and they need to make particular sacrifices to attend the CLC course. Students from other Caribbean territories, from Tobago and from the farthest parts of Trinidad live in at the hostel at the CLC or stay with relatives or friends in or near Port of Spain. It is still unusual in Trinidad for women to leave home to undertake such a course and, without the support of their families, many might find it impossible. The stress on personal lives can be immense. For example, Susan Borel Vialva is from south Trinidad:

> I have two children aged nine and five. The course is a very big sacrifice financially. My community is not supporting me and my husband has to pay for me to stay here and for materials. So we rely on him to look after the children and find the money for me to stay here. I have to achieve something very great to carry back home to them. I have to really give them something for the sacrifice. I have to work to a very high standard so that everybody can say 'she didn't waste anybody's time'.

Support from parents and communities

Students returning to pre-schools which are part of the Ministry of Education/Servol programme in Trinidad are reasonably confident about the support they will get from their communities and know they will have back-up from Field Officers and the CLC:

> I go home every weekend so I get a chance to tell someone what the programme is all about and everybody is just waiting for September to come. Servol is not only teaching you to attend to the children in

the classroom, they are training you to deal with adults – the parents and the community – and helping you to handle the book work and all the different things. Also to introduce the new system. The majority of communities in the rural areas are not up to date with this method so it would be kind of hard for us to go back into the community with no kind of training with the adults and just introduce this method. I think we are equipped in the sense that when we go back we will be able to communicate with the parents. Show them how we will introduce this method of play and how it will work. After you make it work with the children it will be something that they can carry on and can be passed on. *(Mary Steele, Trinidad)*

I organised things for the parents and community before. They are all older than I am. You feel like this young little miss teaching them, telling them about how to work with the child at home and educate them. It makes you feel good about yourself. You have something to offer, and not only to someone who is younger than you. I don't ever believe that one person is better than someone else. I just believe that some people have more to offer than others and the only reason why I think I have more to offer than these parents is that I have been trained to it. I wouldn't say that I am better. *(Betty Willis, Trinidad)*

The school was private before but now it is becoming part of the programme. So I have to introduce the Servol methods. I know that once I have that foundation, September will be just great. I can't tell you all the plans I have. I am going to have a parent/teachers meeting before I start my teaching practice and tell people exactly what this programme is all about. I fear that first week. The other teacher will be starting in-service training in September, she wants to change as well. In Servol you have to have plans for each subject you do, everything laid out in advance, we never had that before. We have everything planned, the other teacher can't wait to start her training. *(Carol Sambury, Trinidad)*

Introducing new ideas into traditional communities

Those who are returning to other islands will also receive back-up from the CTC, but in many cases they are among the pioneers, introducing new ideas and methods into traditional communities:

I am the second person to come on this course from Turks and Caicos. The challenge will be not just introducing the programme in my community but showing the effects it can have on the lives of young children. I will have to start with an awareness programme

and get parents involved in seeing what their children can learn from this playway method. (*Susan Swann, Turks and Caicos*)

It will be a big challenge to get the parents involved, to tell them about Servol's method and how we are going to go about working in the school. Most are young, teenagers, very few are over 25, a lot are single. It's a challenge but I'll try my best to meet it. (*Lauvette Webster, Anguilla*)

I am going to need a lot of money to develop my centre; it is in a community that is not fully developed. The parents are very concerned about what happens to their children. They show interest; we have good relationships. Sometimes they can't come to meetings because they are working long hours. But I would like to start some form of educational programme for the younger people in the community who don't have a skill. They are the problem; the youths are the ones involved in drugs. I will try to help them as best as possible. (*Veranciska James, Jamaica*)

I think I am the fifth student from Montserrat who has passed through this course and I hope we can get together and pool our experience and see how we can get this knowledge to the other 12 schools. It won't happen overnight because for every one that is aware there are four that are not aware. The challenge is not to fall back into what we did before the course. There is a lot of pressure out there. The formal method has been there for so long and you come and say play, play. Parents come to school and say "all they do is play, we want them to learn". And that in itself will be a battle for me: to get the parents to understand. They are playing but they are learning. (*Agatha Simmonds, Montserrat*)

The adults in the communities to which these trainees are returning know only the traditional 'rote learning' method – which is the way they were themselves taught. They are also unused to the concept of parental and community involvement in the education of their children. The challenge for the returning trainees is thus multi-faceted but, as the following chapter illustrates, most of them are more than capable of facing it.

1 Except where otherwise indicated, the quotations in this chapter are taken from conversations held in Trinidad during April and May 1990.

2 *Annual evaluative report on the nationwide early childhood education programme in Trinidad and Tobago covering the period August 1988 – July 1989*. Servol, Port of Spain, 1989

'It belongs to the community'

> Are you asking us to believe that a slip of a girl can really achieve a fundamental change in parental and community attitudes and behaviour patterns, as they relate to small children?'

This is the question that was posed by Servol in its Annual Evaluative Report for 1988-1989.[1] The answer has to be a qualified yes. It is qualified because the programme is still in its early years, because not all trainees can perform at the same high level, and because parents and communities differ immensely from one another. It is also qualified because expectations, both on the part of Servol and on the part of the trainees themselves, are extremely high – in terms of the nature of possible change as well as in terms of the time needed to achieve it. But there can be no doubt that changes *are* occurring in attitudes and in behaviour.

> Parents in this community tend to deal with children very harshly; they hit, cuff, push, curse; it is really terrible. I have to break that out of them when they come here. I have to get it over to them, to the parents too, that is not the way, try it this way, talk to them. I was a mother before I became a teacher and I had a similar type of thing in me, a lash, and I have seen that it doesn't work. There are other ways.

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much nicer ways, things you can do and sit with them together, one to one. (*teacher, Port of Spain*)[2]

We had a session with the parents about discipline; they said they feel they need to beat the child. That was a very good session because from it a parent was able to say 'I try taking away things that they like, I try stopping a TV programme,' different forms of punishment. It was a very good session. (*teacher, central Trinidad*)

Parents too noticed differences in their own behaviour and attitudes:

I have six children, the youngest is at the Servol pre-school. The others also went to pre-schools but they didn't have all these activities. It was more the three Rs; they gave you a book list for a three year old. The Servol concept includes everything. The one from youngest was in a Servol pre-school for just four months and is now in primary school. It made a wonderful difference. Servol's playway method is much better. All that discipline, hugging and kissing and telling them that everything is good. I never did that with my older ones. (*parent, Port of Spain*)

'You can see the healthiness happening to the child'

An evaluation of the programme noted that, despite a steadily worsening economic situation in most areas, 'improvements in nutrition were reported by most teachers and supervisors … junk food, soft drinks and snacks have virtually been eliminated from the children's lunch pails, replaced by fruit, vegetables …'[3]

My son says: 'miss says don't bring a candy, bring a fruit' so he will insist that I don't buy that candy and give him a banana or an orange to eat in the break. (*parent, central Trinidad*)

There is not enough food to eat, not enough money sometimes to prepare a little snack for them to bring here. They tend to buy a 25 cent biscuit in a pack; that is what they can afford, or a package of corn curls, or a sweet drink, not too healthy. And then we try to show them that for the same money they can prepare something at home. Simple little things like a milk drink or potato or carrot sticks.

The school has been a help to parents. At first you see nothing, but after a term they start coming and liaising with the teachers; you can see the healthiness happening to the child. (*teacher, Port of Spain*)

The changes come about because of the programme's integration of all aspects of a young child's life. What actually happens in the pre-school is important: the way the pre-school teacher behaves with and relates to the three to five year olds in her charge matters very much, particularly in the example she sets for the parents and other members of the community who come to listen, to watch and, frequently, to join in. But the pre-school teacher trained by Servol has a remit wider than the four hours or so she spends each day with the children. She is expected to undertake parent education activities; she has to support and work with a Community Board of Education and a Parent Teachers Association (PTA); and she is expected to influence the wider community so that it can provide a loving and healthy environment for the young children growing up within it. And, extraordinary though it may seem, many of these 'slips of girls' do manage to influence the wider community. Here are some examples of what such teachers have done, in the teachers' own words and reported by Servol.

> In the days prior to the school, the [community] Centre was just another venue for idle talk and drug trafficking. I was determined to hide away my doubts and fears, and challenge the situation with a positive look. My surveys contributed a great deal in helping to better my community. So too all my community projects, my greatest resource being the youths of the area. Great respect is afforded to me and 'liming' near the Centre is now a thing of the past. *(teacher, central Trinidad)*

> People in the community have accepted the pre-school very well and are always willing to assist in whatever way they can. They have become more aware of the need for a pre-school and have accepted and understood the curriculum and how it is done by learning through play. *(teacher, south Trinidad)*

Not all communities are so responsive. Obviously the outcome depends on the personality of the teacher as well as on the interrelationships between her and the community:

> The people of ... are not very encouraging and one almost has to bribe them to participate in anything. As yet I have not managed to get the Centre painted. I have had to change Board members so many times it's embarrassing. However, it seems that I've finally found some people who are willing to help but still I don't think they are taking things seriously enough. Almost everything is still left up to me. I do all the work. *(teacher, east Trinidad)*

Not only the parents

The activities undertaken by teachers are many and varied. The majority are closely linked to the pre-school and its activities so that parents and other community members become involved in building, repairing and otherwise maintaining the school and its equipment; they collect and make materials for use by the children; they organise and attend fundraising events. There are also activities – such as environmental clean-up campaigns, laying on water supplies or organising classes – which are aimed at the wider community.

> Right now we have a 'teach one, teach one' programme. About eight parents come in every Wednesday. If you know a craft you teach it, and the next week somebody else will teach something. Yesterday we had 13 to 15 year olds who go to the junior secondary and they are joining us on their half day off. So we have other people from the community, not just parents. *(teacher, central Trinidad)*

> Every second Thursday in the month, members of the community come to the Centre for public assistance or old age pensions and I grasp these opportunities to make our community more aware of our programme. At times our children will sing to them some nursery songs or say some rhymes and as the pensioners look on you can see how happy they are to see their little ones perform so well. Also when we are teaching they look so amazed to see the little ones painting or playing together with materials, building something in a group. Then you will hear them whispering to each other 'look how different children are being taught at school now, no licks, no punishment; this is really a different time, everything changing for these young people'. *(teacher, south Trinidad)*

Concern for health is an important facet, not only the children's health but that of the parents and the entire community. Many rural communities have no regular medical or dental services. The nearest clinic may be several kilometers away; transport is difficult and irregular and the costs may be considerable for people on very low incomes. Several teachers have tried to tackle the problem:

> I wanted medical assistance for both children of the pre-school and other people in the area, especially the very old and those who cannot afford a doctor's fee. But what I did achieve was medical assistance for children only in the school. The doctor was kind enough to volunteer his time and effort to visit the school once a term ... this is all the time he could spare us. But we are still seeking assistance

from another doctor so as to encourage him to volunteer his time to the less fortunate people in the village and the older folks also.

We didn't achieve better dental assistance because we did not get a dentist to volunteer his time during school hours. We are working on this objective this term. (*teacher, central Trinidad*)

Including special children

If a pre-school is to be part of a community it needs to reflect that community. For Servol, this means including handicapped children. For some of them, it might be the only educational experience they will ever have. Here is how one teacher described the inclusion of a Down's Syndrome child:

She was at home; the parents had her isolated. I felt she could do much more and I asked the mother to send her but she said she would be wasting money. I said 'don't pay any school fees', so she decided to send her. Now she is saying how much help she is in the house, cleaning up, sweeping; she didn't do any of that before, just lazed around. She is nine now; she's been here two years. When she first came you couldn't understand what she was saying; now she can carry on a conversation. She joins in conversations, asks questions. Another good thing that came out of that was people's attitudes. You find with a child like that people kind of hiding them away; they either make fun of them or ignore them. But the children here treat her as normal. She won't be able to get into the special school, she has passed the age to get in and it is a long way from us. They don't accept children like her in the local primary school.

Another Down's Syndrome girl, aged six, attends a different pre-school with her five year old sister. Her mother has seen many changes in the past two years since she has been attending:

She has learnt a lot since she went to school. She is talking much better now. She was talking before but only the family could understand what she was saying. Now she is picking up more from the other children. The principal of the primary school has said she will take both the girls so they will be starting in September and they will still be together.

'A cumulative effect on parental practices'

The reason why Servol places so much emphasis on parental and community involvement is its conviction that the early years are crucial to the development of a human being. By the age of three, a child's character is

substantially shaped and by the age of six that character is fundamentally resistant to change. What happens in and around the home therefore forms the most important aspect in a child's development. To this end, the entire programme is conceived so that 'it permits the teacher to make contact with those adults responsible for the bringing up of children and to influence their child rearing practices positively in such a way that the *subsequent* groups of children who enter the school will have benefited from the heightened consciousness of parents and community *vis-à-vis* child development. In other words, the programme aims at having a cumulative effect on parental practices over a period of time.'[4]

The teachers take this very seriously indeed. In many parts of the world, parental involvement in schools is defined as inviting parents to meetings and open days and expecting them to raise funds. The Servol pre-school teachers go much deeper. They work directly with parents, visiting them at home, organising meetings and educational activities, discussing all aspects of child development, encouraging them to participate in the everyday life of the school:

> Due to parents visiting the school, attending meetings, talks and going on field trips, they have developed a different attitude towards their children and the school. They are more aware of the curriculum and how the school functions. When parents take their children out they point out educational places, buildings and other things of interest. They look for shapes and colours on buildings and vehicles. When children look at a programme on television or hear a story, they retell the story or say what programme they have seen. (*teacher, south Trinidad*)

> A few parents were very much aware that a good start in life or a good foundation is important before the child attends primary school. Some parents were reluctant at first asking why they should pay for pre-school education when primary school education is free. Others could not wait to get their children out of the house. Now parents do not only help financially or with transport but by coming in and telling the children religious stories, how to make the different dress such as a *sari* or a *dhoti*. Parents help with the supervision of children and come in from time to time to stay with the children on the days we have workshops. (*teacher, central Trinidad*)

> Convincing parents that forcing young children to read and write in school, and beating them to learn is not the right way, was more a task with the older experienced parents than with those who were new and young and who were willing and excited about the new ideas. By the end of term, more parents were convinced and

participated fully in the daily educating of their children. *(teacher, south Trinidad)*

Even when parents do not respond, the teacher does not give up:

> Getting my parents to participate is the most difficult task of all. Out of 23 parents only six to eight come to PTA meetings. They don't agree, they don't disagree with anything I say. All in all, I have not given up hope as yet. I only hope that Servol has as much patience as I do. I really have a very difficult task working with my community which sometimes seems very hopeless. *(teacher, east Trinidad)*

Despite the difficulties, many parents report that they are learning new methods of relating to their children:

> The teachers treat kids as if they were their own; they treat them with love and understanding. If they misbehave, the punishment is not too harsh, what is good for the kids. Like if a child misbehaves they put them aside for a little while. They don't hit them. *(parent, central Trinidad)*

> I didn't know that there was so much that you could learn before primary school. *(parent, Port of Spain)*

Parents in the classroom

It is not unusual for parents to help out in the classroom; in many cases they will even take over when a teacher is ill or has to attend workshops. They also assist with field trips which could be to the local shop along the road but could also be further afield: the zoo, the fire station, post office, library, beach, botanic gardens and so on. Such activities fulfil a number of functions: they are occasions for teacher, children and parents to get to know one another better; they provide opportunities for outings which very few families can afford by themselves; and they are learning experiences for all concerned, particularly the children:

> On some days we go for walks in the neighbourhood visiting homes of friends or the sick or to a place, for example the shop. On returning to school our lessons focus on these visits, getting the children to know more about the people and places in the area. *(teacher, south Trinidad)*

Open days, sports days, graduation ceremonies are used as occasions to invite the whole community, as opportunities for parents and children to show off a little and be proud of their accomplishments. Raising funds for the school

is an important part of the activities. More money is always needed – to acquire a new building, to repair and maintain an existing building, to buy materials, to fund fields trips, to top up teachers' salaries.

Barbecues, bazaars, fairs, raffles are all part of the lives of the teachers, parents and Board members. The kind of fundraising activities organised vary according to the community and the resources available. One small community on the outskirts of Port of Spain organised a tea party and fashion show and raised TT$120 while another, in the south of Trinidad, organised a Blockbuster Bazaar which they advertised in the newspapers and on radio and raised TT$30,000.

'It belongs to the community'

Many of the pre-schools are in community centres and have to share their space; some 'borrow' space such as the ground floor of a private house or one end of a church; just a few are fortunate enough to have their own premises. One of these is located on a housing estate in Port of Spain where the teacher explained:

> This school has been here about 19, 20 years. It has been involved with Servol for about seven years. The older people come past and stop and look at the paintings on the wall, they find it so nice. People really feel it belongs to the community.
>
> We try to have a variety of things to attract different people. We have workshops, outings, family days, we go to the beach and stuff like that, try to bring them in, make them feel part of the school. If we need something done, we discuss it and they feel good; they feel a sense of importance. They say 'teacher asked me to make something for the school and I made it'. They see the importance of getting them involved. The youths too, they come in and say 'Miss, have you anything for me to do?' A lot of them say 'I was in this class'.

A mother of a child at the same pre-school is the secretary of the Community Board of Education:

> There are five Board members, some are parents, some grandparents. I have been a member for just a few months. I think we could do a lot better because we tend to leave the strain on the teachers most of the time; sometimes we expect them to do a little more than they should. We are the school board and we are supposed to be there to help. We do come out and help but we could do a little more.
>
> The teachers here are well qualified; they are very friendly, very

nice; they try their best for the kids. So it helped me in making the decision to send my son here. I find he is doing very well; he is learning fast. And you know what I like about the teachers is that if they sense a problem they call the parents and try to find out what the problem is. They don't just ignore the children. They make me aware.

Contrast with 'traditional' nursery schools

What happens to the children when they leave the pre-school and enter the formal system? An evaluation of the first three years of the Ministry/Servol programme looked at some assessments which compared children who had completed their first year in primary school with those from 'traditional nursery schools' as well as with those children with no pre-school experience. In the traditional nursery schools:

> There is a major emphasis on reading, writing and arithmetic and the children are expected to sit at their desks or tables other than at designated recess periods. The major concession to their age is the size of the furniture in the classrooms. The primary schools in some instances therefore reported that some children from the traditional pre-schools out-performed some Servol-trained children in the traditional 'three Rs'. Traditionally trained children compared unfavourably in communication skills and alertness.
>
> Primary schools particularly commented on the Servol-trained children's superior conceptualisation and superior social skills, and also on the ease with which the Servol children spoke up in class, their communication skills generally, and their cooperativeness in mingling with other children and in getting along with their teachers.
>
> Unfortunately, these are skills that are not necessarily encouraged in a number of schools in the primary school system and there is no way of assessing, at the present time, whether the improved communication, conceptual and socialisation skills conferred by Servol training will endure the regular school system.[5]

The move to primary school

Teachers in the field, among all their other tasks, endeavour to make and maintain good relationships with local primary schools. They visit principals and infant teachers and invite them to visit the pre-school. They find out what is being taught and try to prepare the three to five year olds as best they can. In general, this liaison works well and the children appear to have few problems when they enter primary school. If anything, it is the primary school teachers who have the problems:

> Generally the children from the Servol pre-school come with a certain amount of knowledge, but what the teachers find is that they are somewhat overactive and this some of them cannot cope with. Not so much overactive, but the normal child who stays home until age five is not extrovert. It makes it a little difficult because you have to pick out those who have not been and you have to cope with those who are ready to go. Sometimes we cannot separate the two groups. The last intake we were able to do so.
>
> The pre-school children are as though they have all the energy in the world. They are very confident of themselves. Having to cope with this set of children and those who are unsure of themselves, they are still clinging on to mummy; the teacher has problems with them. *(primary school principal, central Trinidad)*

It is obvious that the Servol methods are already having an effect on the primary education system and that this will increase as more pre-schools are opened, as parents' expectations grow, and as the formal teaching establishment adjusts its methodology to one that is suited to the needs of the communities it serves.

But there is at least one child who does not want his pre-school to change one little bit. A teacher in Tobago reported:

> One incident that stands out clear in my mind is that of a child who was transferred to our school due to being beaten and forced to read at his former school. He was pleased to be at our school and within his first week remarked "I would like to send my child to this school when I get big." What a compliment!

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

1. *Annual Evaluative Report on the Nationwide Early Childhood Education Programme in Trinidad and Tobago covering the period August 1988 – July 1989*. Servol, Port of Spain, 1989.

2. Except where otherwise indicated, the quotations in this chapter are taken from conversations held in Trinidad during April and May 1990.

3. *Evaluation Report on Servol's Development of Non-Formal Programmes of Early Childhood Education and Care in High-Risk Areas*. Personnel Management Services Ltd., Port of Spain, 1990.

4. *Annual Evaluative Report*, op cit.

5. *Evaluation Report*, op cit.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A matter of listening

> Even though the project seems to be focusing on changing the adolescents or the children, our hidden agenda is to change the parents, both actual and potential.[1]

Father Gerry Pantin, founder and Executive Director of Servol, made this comment 20 years after he first walked up a hill in Laventille, Port of Spain and asked "how can we help you?"

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The hidden agenda

Servol's hidden agenda is fulfilled in several ways. First, by insisting that centres are run by communities, Servol tells the community in a very direct way that it has a responsibility for its children, plus the right to make decisions about them. This contrasts with the formal education systems in most countries of the world, including Trinidad and Tobago, where a distant bureaucracy decrees where schools will be built and what will be taught in them, and allows parents inside the premises on very restricted terms.

Second, the adolescent programmes deal with actual and potential parents at an age when they are still open to new ideas and ways of behaving. Evaluations of students have shown that the two areas which make the most impression upon them are the self-awareness and the parenting programmes; both help them to understand what had happened to them during their own childhood and show them that there are alternatives.

Third, the pre-school teacher training programme emphasises the role of parents in bringing up children over that of the teacher. It insists on parental involvement in the pre-school and on education programmes to help parents understand and cope with the immense task of bringing up young children. The teacher's role is thus facilitative rather than dominant.

Fourth, parents are expected to play a role in the adolescent programmes as well. Servol insists that a parent or guardian always accompanies a teenager registering for the ADP and does what it can to involve the parents further. This is, again, in contrast to the formal education system which both explicitly and implicitly tells parents of children at secondary school level that their only task is to get the children to school and after that, the school is responsible for the child's education.

The agenda, whether hidden or not, is one that appeals to a number of other organisations. One of these is the Water and Sewage Authority (WASA) which asked Servol to run courses for its staff. In characteristic fashion, Servol refused but offered instead to train WASA staff to run the courses themselves. Another is the Ministry of National Security which has sent prison officers on the ADP instructors' training course so that they can set up a variation of the ADP for young offenders about to be released from prison. Programmes began in two prisons in September 1990.

A transforming effect on society

Can quality be maintained as programmes expand throughout Trinidad and Tobago, to other Caribbean territories, even to organisations that have nothing to do with education as it is usually defined? Gerry Pantin is

convinced that, because of the emphasis on the community-based nature of the programme, quality can be maintained. He sees parenting and self-awareness as the crucial parts of the programme, because these help to train people to be parents in a more enlightened way and, ultimately, this will transform society.

An example of this is the way in which new pre-school places have been provided through the early childhood programme run jointly by the Ministry of Education and Servol. In 1985, the Ministry published a five-year education plan[2] which foresaw an increase in the total number of pre-school places available (both public and private) from 22,000 in 1985 to approximately 29,000 in 1990. Although the quantitative target has not been met, the Ministry of Education/Servol programme had stimulated the provision of at least 2,500 new places by September 1989, all in pre-schools run by their communities which emphasise parental involvement and which have at least one trained teacher. It is this emphasis on quality that transforms a plan for the provision of a service into a means of altering a society's perception of itself and of its ability to change.

Training for the real world

Money is needed to carry out such a programme. Here again Servol has its own approach which is, in very simple terms, that there is no such thing as a free handout. On an organisational level, Servol gets approximately 60 per cent of its total income from local sources and the remainder from foundations abroad.[3] The amount raised locally is made up of one third donations – mainly from an annual 'Poor man's dinner' – and two-thirds is earned through production. The vocational workshops at the Life Centres are training adolescents for the real world outside. That means that they are not only learning, they are undertaking contract work and earning money for themselves and for Servol.

An example of one money-earner is catering – there are catering departments at the Beetham, Forres Park and Sangre Grande Life Centres. Three days a week, these departments provide meals for the school feeding programme. At the Beetham, for example, the instructors and trainees prepare 1,500 meals. But success can lead to problems as Gerry Pantin explained:

> We have been asked to provide meals five days a week but we are hesitant. The production of these meals is very hectic. We are training the youngsters to work in the commercial sector which is fast moving. But we have to ask ourselves whether the extra income can compensate for the fact that we would lose that breathing space of two days a week to teach the trainees different culinary skills. We try

to keep a balance between education and production in which we do not sacrifice either one for the other.

All trainees have to pay fees for the courses they do with Servol, although these do not cover the costs. In January 1990, Servol calculated that the cost of training an adolescent – ADP and vocational skills – came to an average of TT$3,120. Fees for trainees are TT$600 for a year and they also have to find money for their uniforms, travel, meals and working tools. Many potential trainees, and their families, do not have this kind of money, so Servol helps them, not by granting scholarships or giving handouts, but by finding them work. A leaflet issued in 1990 explains:

> Let us begin by teaching you perhaps the most important lesson of your life – nothing in life is free, there is a price to be paid for everything. Servol will arrange weekend jobs for anyone who so desires; Servol will collect the money and credit it to your account; Servol will arrange to provide you with whatever you need with the money earned. All you need is to contact your instructor or coordinator and we will take it from there.[4]

The pre-schools are not free either. Servol's contribution is to train and supervise the teachers and administer the overall programme with funds from the Ministry of Education and overseas Foundations. Communities are responsible for acquiring and maintaining buildings, furniture and equipment and the Boards of Education are expected to hold fundraising events. Parents pay fees, usually TT$25 per month, for their children to attend, but one of the objectives of fundraising is to have some money to help parents who cannot afford this.

'It is a heart thing, not a head thing'

The salaries paid by Servol are not high. All staff in the Ministry of Education/Servol programmes earn the same amount – TT$1,400 per month – and they also have health and pension plans. This is also the average salary of staff employed directly by Servol. Pre-school teachers are paid TT$600 per month through the Ministry programme once they have completed the one year full-time course at the CLC and two years' internship. Assistant (unqualified) teachers receive TT$300 per month, or TT$500 during training. Communities are expected to add to these salaries through fundraising activities. For purposes of contrast, a qualified teacher in the formal system would earn about TT$2,600 to start and an unskilled labourer might earn TT$50 per day but may only be employed occasionally. As a matter of principle, increments paid to Servol staff are at a flat rate rather than by percentages.

Despite the salaries, Servol staff are highly motivated and staff turnover is low. How do they find such people? Whenever a job is advertised, Servol gets many more applications than jobs available, not perhaps surprising at a time of high unemployment, but many applicants have qualifications that could ensure them jobs which are far better paid. When interviewing applicants 'you just get something that this person wants to give of themselves,' said Gerry Pantin. 'He doesn't know exactly how, doesn't know if he can do it, he just has that basic desire. We have found, encouragingly, that it is present in a lot of people, in a high percentage of the population, contrary to what people say. Basically we are looking for something in them that can be developed. It is a heart thing, not a head thing.'

Fund Aid

Diana Mahabir, one of Servol's earliest supporters, is a management and training consultant and the company she heads has undertaken several evaluations of Servol's programmes. She was one of the founders, in 1973, of a sister organisation to Servol which helps individuals and groups to obtain loans for businesses or community projects. Its full name is the Trinidad and Tobago Development Foundation Ltd. but it is known as Fund Aid. Gerry Pantin is its (unpaid) Executive Director.

> In 1973 we were getting so many requests from all over the country from people who wanted us to start Servol programmes, but we were incapable of responding. I conjured up this idea and we started a credit organisation which made an act of faith in the ability of ordinary people to start small projects on their own, manage them on their own, with a bit of financial help. What we did was to go around and sell the idea to the banks and ask them to contribute to what we called a loan guarantee fund, because we were not going to loan the money directly but to guarantee loans at commercial rates and thus save ourselves a lot of paperwork. We also managed to interest organisations like the Inter-American Foundation to give a matching grant to the funds we collected locally, with the result that we eventually collected something in the region of US$400,000.

The capital was invested and the interest used to employ a small staff. Bank loans have been guaranteed for individuals who need money to start or expand a business, usually small-scale, such as a loan for a sewing machine, a refrigerator or an engine for a fishing boat, but also for bigger ventures. All that Fund Aid asks is that five people who have been permanently employed for at least 10 years act as guarantors. Community projects include pre-schools and Life Centres but also electricity and water supplies or recreational facilities. 'If it is a community,' said Pantin, 'the money is secure

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because if 200 people promise to pay one dollar a month, the community puts pressure on everybody to pay up.'

It might sound idealistic but, according to Mahindra Maharaj who works for Fund Aid, 99.5 per cent of all community loans and 97.4 per cent of small business loans are up to date or have been repaid. The average loan is TT$5,000 and the maximum is around TT$20,000. In mid-1990, Fund Aid entered a new phase when the Inter-American Bank made a low-interest loan of US$500,000, which enabled Fund Aid to make direct loans.

Several adolescents have obtained loans from Fund Aid to start small businesses after they have completed their vocational training and several private pre-schools have been opened with Fund Aid's assistance by graduates of the CLC. But despite the close link with Servol, the majority of loans have gone to individuals and communities that have nothing to do with the organisation.

And thus Servol and its sister organisation, Fund Aid, are helping in the process of self-development on the educational, personal, social, cultural and economic levels. Running through all the activities is the same philosophy, the same approach: that is, to make people believe that they can do what they want to do by their own efforts, and that they do not have to sit around and wait for handouts. Gerry Pantin summed it up as follows:

> It is all directed at influencing the attitudes of all the adults who are concerned with the bringing up of children – primarily the parents, secondarily the teachers, and I suppose ultimately, the politicians.

Learning to work together

During her evaluation of the Ministry of Education/Servol pre-school programme, Diana Mahabir spoke to many people in communities and was struck by how many commented on the way they were learning to work together.

> One of the problems we have had right from the beginning, also in establishing Fund Aid, was that people in communities did not want to do anything for themselves because they had been programmed by the political system to wait for handouts. The effect on the community in terms of people's attitudes towards government's role in their lives is really revolutionary. People are starting to see that they have responsibility to do things.
>
> It isn't just self-help; it is more than that – it is a community recognition of the value of the power of the *gestalt*, that together we

can do an awful lot that we cannot individually do. That is going to have a profound effect on all kinds of things in the country. When you think about a country this small, the exponential effect of that is very rapid.

To my mind, Servol is a genuine revolutionary organisation and has had a far-reaching effect in terms of its past effect on communities and what I perceive as its future effect on communities and the whole social and cultural patterns of Trinidad, economic and political.

The kind of revolution Mahabir is talking about is very far from the incident that captured the world's headlines for a few days in July 1990. Nevertheless, there are tensions, particularly racial tensions, in the country which should not be ignored. Some observers see politicians as the culprits, in that they use race to stir up feelings, particularly at election time, but all agree that there is a certain guardedness between the races, as well as a great deal of ignorance and misunderstanding about ethnic and cultural differences.

One way in which Servol tackles this is through that section of the SPICES curriculum that deals with spirituality. This is not to be confused with religion. Gerry Pantin explained that they brought the spiritual element into courses when it was realised 'that the young people had such weird ideas about God and we felt at least that we could correct those ideas which were so based on superstition'. In place of superstition, they use examples of religious leaders such as Jesus Christ, Ghandi, Mohammed, Martin Luther King. A handbook[5] published for the pre-school programme emphasises the need to help children understand and internalise values and attitudes such as love, gratitude, appreciation and reverence as well as warmth, honesty, forgiveness, joy, generosity and kindness. By teaching children respect for others, Servol is also passing the same messages on to their parents and communities. By ensuring that children learn about the beliefs of others, their parents and communities are also gaining knowledge and understanding about the values of other ethnic groups.

Recognition at home and abroad

One of the great ironies of Servol is that until recently it has received more recognition outside of Trinidad and Tobago than within it. Other Caribbean governments have asked Servol to help set up programmes; foundations in Europe and the USA have given generous donations; visitors have come from many countries to listen and to learn; Gerry Pantin and his colleagues have been invited to talk to seminars and conferences in Asia, Africa, east and west Europe, North, Central and South America. But at home, although the previous PNM government gave financial support to Servol amounting to around 2.5 per cent of its annual expenditure plus capital grants for buildings,

it viewed Servol as just another voluntary organisation and made no attempt to incorporate any aspect of Servol's programmes into the education system.

But recognition at home has come at last. As a report on the Early Childhood Programme put it:

> It has been a long, long journey from September 8, 1970 when we walked into a community centre in Shanty Town to find a young woman with a guava switch teaching children to read and write, to the bestowal of Oxford certificates on our graduates.[6]

A local newspaper, also referring to the certificates granted by the University of Oxford, noted that 'Servol has now become an institution in our country,' and ended its article with the words: 'Certainly, this voluntary organisation has become another reason for us to have pride in ourselves.'[7]

Mutually beneficial relationship

Since the end of 1986, Servol has been working more closely with the government or, at least, with the Ministry of Education. The change in the relationship has occurred because the Ministry has recognised that Servol is not so much an alternative provider of services as a part of the community to which it should be listening. At a world conference on education in March 1990, attended by delegations from more than 150 countries, the cooperation between the government of Trinidad and Tobago and Servol was held up as an example of cooperation between the public and the private sectors. Servol's Deputy Executive Director, Sister Ruth Montrichard, has analysed the essential ingredients of this mutually beneficial relationship as follows:

- a Ministry of Education which is non-defensive about flaws in the system;
- a non-governmental organisation which is free to experiment with and evaluate non-formal educational programmes;
- a Ministry of Education which is open to change and preoccupied with evolving a system which caters for all children and not just the majority;
- a non-governmental organisation which is not content to 'do good' for a few hundred children but is preoccupied with seeing its good work extended throughout the nation via the formal system.[8]

A pincer movement

Not everyone in Trinidad and Tobago is convinced. There are some who say that Servol would like to take over the whole education system. Nothing could be further from the truth – a less power-hungry group of people can rarely be found. But it is true that the people in and around Servol want to influence the educational system as a whole. The organisation concentrates on young children and adolescents because these groups are outside the compulsory school age, and so they can be reached through non-formal methods; the formal system obviously fails many of the children passing through it. Adolescents are the parents of tomorrow. Above all, concentration on children at the two ends of the formal education system constitutes a pincer movement aimed at the very heart of that system.

Servol would like to see its approaches used much more widely. Children, their parents and their communities should not only be listened to, they should be recognised as owners of the education system. This means that education must be based on what people actually need and not on what politicians and bureaucrats think they need.

One former politician sees a danger that the government, by working with Servol, is abrogating its responsibilities. Overand Padmore was Minister of Education between 1981 and 1985 and was well aware of the work Servol was doing in the fields of pre-school and adolescent vocational training. He sees no problems with Servol's programmes 'provided the government does not see it as a cheaper way of relieving itself of its fundamental responsibilities, and I suspect this is a direction in which they would wish to go.' The comment should not be seen as sour grapes from a former Minister. It encapsulates a fundamental difference of philosophical approach about the role of government and the role of voluntary organisations.

It is not only in the Caribbean that countries are facing a multitude of phenomena which they have difficulties in coping with. There are few industrialised countries which are not concerned about disaffected and alienated youth, a growing number of teenage pregnancies, rising unemployment, structural poverty, a population which polarises along class or religious or racial lines. The response of some governments is to provide yet more services and more laws; the response of others it is to let go and allow everything to be regulated by the market. What no government ever does is to listen, really listen, to the people.

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NOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN

1. Except where otherwise indicated, the quotations in this chapter are taken from conversations held in Trinidad during April and May 1990.

2. *Education Plan 1985-1990*. Ministry of Education, Schools Publications Branch, Port of Spain, 1985

3. In addition to the Bernard van Leer Foundation in Holland the following foundations have given or are giving funds to Servol: CEBEMO, Holland; HELVETAS, Switzerland; Inter-American Foundation, USA; Misereor, West Germany; Vesper Society of California, USA.

4. *Working your way through Servol*. Servol, Port of Spain, 1990

5. Sister M Roberta, *Spirituality for pre-schoolers*. Servol Printing Services, Port of Spain, 1986.

6. *Servol Journal Report on Activities for the Fourth Quarter*. Servol, Port of Spain, July 1990

7. Editorial in Trinidad *Guardian*, 17 July 1990

8. Montrichard R., 'Putting partnership into practice', *Journal of Community Education*, Vol 8 No 3, 1990

CHAPTER EIGHT

Shaping tomorrow

So where has Servol got to now that it is approaching the grand old age of 21 years? In quantitative terms, it has got rather far for an organisation that started in September 1970 without any concrete aims or objectives, without any paid staff or premises or money, without even a name.

In September 1990, around 4,800 children aged 3 to 5 were being taught by 314 teachers, their work overseen by 17 Field Officers; 31 Life Centres were training 2,250 adolescents, staffed by 88 instructors, Field Officers and trainers. A further 97 people were employed directly by Servol. Each pre-school and each Life Centre has a community board of education with between five and ten members – so that approximately 1,300 people are involved in the management of 'their' centres in their own communities. When we bring parents into the picture, we find some 20,000 people actively involved in Servol at any one time.

An adolescent would usually spend about 15 months with Servol, a pre-school child two years, and thus the number of people in Trinidad and Tobago – children, adolescents, parents and community members – who are touched by the Servol methodology and approach is continually expanding. The numbers involved in other Caribbean territories is impossible to estimate. In addition to the 77 pre-school teachers from other countries trained at the CLC since it opened in 1981, Servol has also trained instructors for adolescent programmes and trainers for pre-school teachers in other countries – Grenada has its own New Life Organisation (NEWLO)

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working with adolescents, while Guyana and St Lucia both now have their own early childhood training courses.

But if the reader has been listening carefully to the voices of the people in these pages, he or she will know that it is not numbers which matter most to Servol.

'There are no successes or failures'

A question that is often asked about such programmes is their success rate. As in so many other things, Servol has evolved its own way of looking at this.

> In genuine community work which involves sensitive dialogue with the community, there are no successes or failures in the sense that that question is put. Every moment you spend in patiently working at the pace of a given community is a huge success; every project you implement always falls short of what is required, since the community is a dynamic, living, growing entity which develops new needs as soon as the existing ones are filled. According to the Servol definition, the only failure in this type of work is to stop believing in people, to stop trusting them and to lose all confidence in their ability to solve their own problems, with a little help from friends.[1]

In its Annual Report for the Ministry of Education/Servol Adolescent Development Programme for 1989-1990, an example is given of how Servol dealt with what, in most other organisations, would be called a failure.

The Board of Education of a Community Life Centre wished to emphasise the vocational training aspect of the work to the detriment of the ADP. Servol explained, politely, that if the trainees could not complete the 14-week ADP before beginning vocational training, then the Life Centre could not be part of the programme. It further explained that any trainees wishing to attend a Regional Life Centre for vocational training could not be accepted until they had successfully completed the ADP. The Board was allowed to retain some funds to keep its Centre running and the two sides parted company. One month later, the Board wrote to Servol 'extolling the virtues of the ADP and requesting to be hurriedly re-assigned a field officer and, in effect, be accepted back into the Ministry/Servol fold'. The moral, as drawn by Servol, is that respectful intervention is not just about going into communities respectfully, it is also about withdrawing from them respectfully.

Other Community Life Centres and some pre-schools have also been withdrawn from the Ministry/Servol programmes when their Boards of Education have failed to find adequate premises, or when personality clashes

among Board members have made life impossible for the staff and students. In one case, a pre-school was closed when local gossip about a teacher led to the withdrawal of pupils and the Board of Education had failed to take remedial action.

Servol's methodology of tough love applies to communities as well as to individuals.

The question of replicability

Servol has always refused to set up similar programmes when asked by organisations in the Caribbean and elsewhere. If the Servol approach is carefully analysed, the reason for the negative response becomes obvious. The core of the approach is listening – listening to what people are saying and helping those people to respond to their needs in the way they are best able to do so. Trinidad and Tobago is a unique society and Servol is a product of a unique set of circumstances. As such, it is not replicable.

It is no accident that this book contains no syllabus or curriculum for any of the programmes. This is because what works in Trinidad and Tobago will not necessarily work elsewhere. There are early childhood and adolescent development programmes elsewhere in the Caribbean which have taken their inspiration from Servol, but which have developed according to the needs and aspirations of their own societies.

What are the elements of the approach? I began this book with a quotation from Gerry Pantin in which he emphasises listening, consulting with the community, having patience to wait and proceed at the pace of the people. In the same chapter, Servol's own vernacular is quoted – the philosophy of ignorance, attentive listening, cultural arrogance, respectful intervention. What we are therefore looking at is an attitude of mind, a belief in people, an acceptance of differences, an openness. For such an approach to work, its practitioners need the ability to pass on these attitudes and values to others – to co-workers and to participants – and to instil in others a confidence in their own abilities and value. Once we have a belief in our own abilities and worth, we can learn the skills specific to the task, whether it is working with young children or elderly people, whether it is setting up a programme for adolescents or helping adults learn new skills. When we believe in people we will not be providing services to them, the 'services' or facilities will be theirs to plan, to manage and to operate.

Our 'community' can be the group we are working with or learning with, or it can be our rural village or urban suburb. However well we think we know our 'community', we should not make assumptions about its needs,

expectations and aspirations. We must start from now, from where people are, and we will only find out where that is by listening patiently.

This is an approach that does not fit easily with the demands of late twentieth century society when plans, detailed timetables and programmes are demanded, and when quantity is generally valued over quality. Yet the one does not necessarily preclude the other. Servol's attempt to shape its tomorrow can be an example and an inspiration to organisations everywhere.

A preferred future

As it entered its 21st year, Servol was planning ahead, not just for the next year or two, but for the next 20 years. The organisation has carried out a planning exercise which involves overall goals in 2010 because

> No organisation should ever arrive at a situation in which everything is falling apart. We have the power in our hands to have a preferred future.[2]

The goal is thus not only to ensure that Servol achieves its preferred future, but that the communities with which it works do so too.

Part of the future for Servol is a Regional Training and Resource Centre (RTRC) which has been established in Port of Spain and was officially opened in October 1990. Funded initially by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, the RTRC aims to act as a resource in early childhood education and adolescent programmes for the whole Caribbean region, drawing not only on the Servol experience but also on experience of other programmes throughout the region.

The ultimate goal for Servol is the improvement of the quality of care and attention of parents towards their children.

> Servol is absolutely convinced that this is the lynch-pin on which hangs all efforts to build a more humane society. The really important goal of all the Servol programmes is parents, actual parents, parents-to-be in a few years and embryonic parents. No matter how widely our efforts are applauded in the education of small children or adolescents; no matter how effective we are in rehabilitating prisoners or inculcating genuine attitudes towards work and self-help; all these achievements are minor victories if we fail to create new, aware, sensitised parents for the children of the next generation.[3]

Is there any possibility that this odd organisation can achieve its goals? Can

it really affect the parents of the next generation throughout the Caribbean? Can it really change the way in which people perceive themselves? Can communities be weaned from a culture of dependence on authority figures and gain the confidence to make their own choices, to become sufficiently empowered to choose and to possess their preferred futures? It sounds unlikely. And yet I think back to the people I met in Trinidad: the staff of Servol who work with total single-mindedness in the pursuit of excellence; the pre-school teachers who organise their communities and educate the parents as well as engendering a love of learning in the children; the parents and members of Boards of Education who give their time and energy unselfishly for the benefit of others; the young men and women from impoverished backgrounds possessing no formal qualifications who spoke and behaved with such confidence and poise. I know that *they* have the power to possess their preferred futures. And if they have it, let us hope their communities will have it too.

NOTES TO CHAPTER EIGHT

1 Montrichard R., *Servol faces the eighties*. Servol Printing Services, Port of Spain, 1980, p 13

2 *Work Plan for National and Caribbean Adolescent and Early Childhood Programmes for Period August 1990 – July 1991*. Servol, Port of Spain, 1990

3 *Ibid*

Publications

Except where otherwise shown, the following publications are available free of charge to interested individuals and organisations. Please write to the Communications Section, Bernard van Leer Foundation, PO Box 82334, 2508 EH, The Hague, The Netherlands.

Newsletter
The Foundation Newsletter reports on the work of Foundation-supported projects throughout the world and provides information on issues related to early childhood care and education. Published four times a year (January, April, July and October) in English. Copies of most back issues are available on request. ISSN 0921-5840

The work of the Bernard van Leer Foundation
An introductory leaflet about the aims and work of the Foundation. Published 1989 in English, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch.

Current Programme 1990
This publications contains brief descriptions of 105 major projects being supported by the Foundation in 42 developing and industrialised countries. Illustrated throughout, the booklet also includes an annual report for 1989. Published 1990 in English (ISSN 0921-5948), and in Spanish as *Programa Actual 1990* (ISSN 0924-302X)

The Power to Change, Andrew Chetley
The basic ingredients of this book are a small-scale early childhood project in one village which grew to encompass whole communities in the Costa Atlántica region of Colombia; a university with a commitment to the people of the region; and a willingness to listen to and learn from the people of the barrios. If there is a lesson to be learned from this experience, it is that development is something that has to be undertaken by people, not done to them. It is a lesson that is relevant to all of us everywhere. Published 1990 in English. ISBN 90-6195-019-8. (A Spanish-language translation is also available.)

Paths to Empowerment, Ruth Paz
This book traces the development of community education projects which have been supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation in Israel over a 10-year period. Giving both theoretical background and practical examples, it illustrates how the values and operational modes of community development have been synthesised and incorporated into the world of early childhood education. The importance of the community promoter, or para-professional,

the woman from the community who learns and leads the others into learning, is highlighted. The book traces the gradual maturation of practices in a variety of projects in different settings, not as a rigid model to be followed but as a compendium of real life experiences and thinking which can be built upon by communities involved in early childhood care and education wherever they are in the world. Published 1990 in English. ISBN 90-6195-018-X

A Small Awakening: the work of the Bernard van Leer Foundation 1965-1986, Hugh Philp with Andrew Chetley
Based on research undertaken by Professor Hugh Philp, the Foundation Consultant for Australasia, this publication traces the development of the Foundation through its projects and other activities over a 20 year period. From an initial focus on compensatory education, the Foundation's work has evolved, in the light of experience, to its present emphasis on the development of children in the context of their own environments. Published 1988 in English. ISBN 90-6195-015-5

Beyond Child Survival: towards a new future, Report of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1986-1987
The second biennial report of the Bernard van Leer Foundation covers activities during the years 1986 and 1987. The report includes feature articles on projects in Mozambique, Singapore, Ireland, Italy, Trinidad and Colombia ... well as summaries of work undertaken during the period in 40 developing and industrialised countries. Published 1988 in English. ISSN 0921-5921

Occasional papers

Early Childhood Care and Education: the Challenge,
Walter Barker (Occasional Paper No 1)
The first in a series of Occasional Papers addressing issues of major importance to policy makers, practitioners and academics concerned with meeting the educational and developmental needs of disadvantaged children. Published 1987 in English.

Meeting the Needs of Young Children: Policy Alternatives, Glen Nimnicht and Marta Arango with Lydia Hearn (Occasional Paper No 2)
The paper reviews conventional, institution-based approaches to the care and education of young children in disadvantaged societies and proposes the development of alternative, low-cost strategies which take account of family and community resources and involvement as the starting point for such programmes. Published 1987 in English.

Evaluation in Action: a case study of an under-fives centre in Scotland. Joyce Watt (Occasional Paper No 3)
The main body of this paper is the evaluation report of a Foundation-supported project in the United Kingdom. It is preceded by an examination of the issues involved in evaluation together with an explanation of the way in which this particular study was carried out. It has been published with the external evaluator in mind, but will be of interest to all those involved in the evaluation of community-oriented projects. Published 1988 in English. ISBN 90-6195-014-7

Seminar reports

Children and community: progressing through partnership
Summary report and conclusions of the tenth International Seminar held in Kingston, Jamaica in November 1988. Published 1989 in English and Spanish. ISBN 90-6195-016-3

Children at the Margin: a challenge for parents, community and professionals
Summary report and conclusions of the third Eastern Hemisphere Seminar held in Newcastle, Australia in November 1987. Published 1988 in English. ISBN 90-6195-013-9

The Parent as Prime Educator: changing patterns of parenthood
Summary report and conclusions of the fourth Western Hemisphere Seminar held in Lima, Peru in May 1986. Published 1986 in English, Spanish, Portuguese and French.

Multicultural Societies: early childhood education and care
Summary report and conclusions of an International Seminar held in Granada, Spain in June 1984. Published 1984 in English, Spanish and Portuguese.

The following publications are available through booksellers or as shown. They are not available from the Foundation.

Explorations in Early Childhood Education. John Braithwaite
1985, Victoria, The Australian Council for Educational Research, Radford House, Frederick Street, Hawthorn, Victoria 3122, Australia. A$20 plus A$3 handling charge. ISBN 0-85563-478-2

The Gifted Disadvantaged: a ten year longitudinal study of compensatory education in Israel. Moshe Smilansky & David Nevo
1979, London/New York/Paris, Gordon & Breach Inc., 50 West 23rd Street, New York, NY 10022, USA. US$ 46.25. ISBN 0-677-04400-0

The following four books are available, price £2.50 each, from Community Education Development Centre, Briton Road, Coventry, CV2 4LF, England. Please add £0.50 per £5.00 value of order for postage, plus £1.00 per order for overseas postage.

Women and Children First: Home Link, Elizabeth Filkin (ed)
This book presents an account of the Home Link project which has been serving residents of Liverpool, England continuously since 1973. Elizabeth Filkin has edited the work of a large group of women contributors to provide an open and self-critical assessment of the programme. Ypsilanti, The High/Scope Press, 1984. ISBN 0-931114-26-8

A Mole Cricket called Servol, Gerard Pantin
In 1970 the newly independent nation of Trinidad and Tobago was rocked by a social explosion, and the effect on the traditional, easy-going way of life was catastrophic. This book describes how a Trinidadian Roman Catholic priest and a West Indian cricket player, went into the areas of poverty to try to help. Ypsilanti, The High/Scope Press, 1983. ISBN 0-931114-17-9

The Servol Village, Gerard Pantin
This book continues the story begun in **A Mole Cricket called Servol** and describes how Servol has grown from a street corner community development project to a national movement in its own right. Ypsilanti, The High/Scope Press, 1984. ISBN 0-931114-27-6

Seeking Change, Ann Short
This book describes an early childhood education project for the children of disadvantaged families in South Africa. Ypsilanti, The High/Scope Press, 1984. ISBN 0-931114-29-2

The four books below report on the outcomes of the Project on Human Potential (1979-1984) supported by the Foundation and carried out by the Graduate School of Education of Harvard University, USA. They are available through booksellers.

Frames of Mind: the theory of multiple intelligences, Howard Gardner
New York, Basic Books, 1983. ISBN 0 465 02509 9 Available in paperback edition: Paladin Books, London, 1985, £5.95. ISBN 0-586-08506-8

Of Human Potential: an essay in the philosophy of education, Israel Scheffler
Boston/London/Melbourne, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985. ISBN 0-7102-0571-6

The Cultural Transition: human experience and social transformation in the Third World and Japan, Merry I White & P Pollack(eds) Boston/London/Melbourne, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986. ISBN 0-7102-0572-4

Human Conditions: the cultural basis of educational developments. Robert A Levine and Merry White Boston/London/Melbourne, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986. ISBN 0-7102-0568-6

Publicaciones en español

Boletin Informativo
Artículos seleccionados de Newsletters. Publicado en 1987 y 1988 y 1989 y 1990. ISSN 0921-593X

La Labor de la Fundación Bernard van Leer
Un folleto sobre la Fundación. Publicado en 1989.

Programa Actual
Consta de breves descripciones de los proyectos de mayor envergadura apoyados por la Fundación, e incluye datos estadísticos relevantes acerca de la población y la educación en la primera infancia de cada país. Publicado en 1990. ISSN 0924-302X

El poder de cambiar por Andrew Chetley
Los ingredientes básicos de este libre son un proyecto de pequeña escala en el campo de la educación infantil en un pueblo, que ha desarrollado a incluir comunidades, todas ellas en la región de Costa Atlántica de Colombia; una universidad con un compromiso con la gente de la región; y la voluntad de querer a escuchar y aprender de la gente de los barrios. Explicada principalamente a través de las palabras de los participantes, el lector vislumbra la vida cotidiana in algunas de las aldeas y pueblos y comienza a entender los esfuerzos meticulosos que debe hacerse para realizar un objetivo de este tipo. La pobreza no ha sido vencida in la Costa Atlántica, pero las semillas de algunas soluciones estan empezando a brotar. Publicado en 1991. ISBN 90-6195-020-1 (también in el inglés)

Niño y comunidad: avanzando mediante la asociacion
Síntesis y Conclusiones del décimo seminario internacional celebrado en Kingston, Jamaica en noviembre 1988. Publicado en 1989.

Los Padres como Primeros Educadores: Cambios en los Patrones de Paternidad
Síntesis y Conclusiones del cuarto seminario del Hemisferio Occidental celebrado en Lima, Perú en mayo 1986. Publicado en 1986.

Aprender a Vivir: Crónica de una Innovación Educativa, Jose R Boeta 1984, Granada, Editorial Andalucía, San Vincente Ferrer 13, Granada, España. ISBN 84-85622-76-6

Publicações em Portugués

O Trabalho da Fundação Bernard van Leer
Um folheto sobre a Fundação. Publicado em 1989.

Os Pais como Primeiros Educadores: Mudando os padrões de Paternidade
Sumário do relatório e conclusões do seminário do Hemisfério Ocidental, Lima, Perú, maio de 1986. Publicado em 1987.

Sociedade Multicultural: Educação e Cuidados com a Primeira Infância
Sumário do relatório e das conclusões do seminário internacional, Granada, Espanha, junho de 1984. Publicado em 1984.

Videos from the Foundation

The Foundation has available a number of videos which form the series 'Alternatives in early childhood care and education'. Copies can be made available to Foundation-suported projects in either the PAL system or the NTSC system on VHS or Betamax. A small charge to cover costs of copying and postage is made to organisations outside the Foundation network. For further information concerning the videos, please contact the Communications Section at the Foundation.

Bernard van Leer Foundation,
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The Netherlands

What do the projects do?

All projects supported by the Foundation have, at their core, the education, care and development of young children. An essential ingredient of projects is the close involvement of the parents of the children and of the surrounding community. This is based on the belief that the home is the most important environment affecting human development, and that the community is also important. Projects do not therefore look only at educational activities which take place in pre-schools, nurseries or primary schools, they work with adults in their own homes and in the community in order to create understanding and awareness of children's developmental needs. This can include the importance of play, making toys and equipment from scrap materials and from the natural environment, information and advice on nutrition and health, and other needs of the children or the community. Many of the people doing this work are women from the same community who have been trained by the project. The involvement of parents and other adults helps to build up their own skills and self-confidence and this, in turn, leads to other improvements in the social and physical structure and the self-assurance of the community as a whole.

Geographical span

In accordance with its statutes, the Foundation gives preference to countries in which the Van Leer group of companies is established.

Applications for suppport

Decisions concerning the funding of major projects are taken by the Board of Trustees of the Foundation. No commitments can be given before such approval by the Board. There are no application forms and the Foundation does not prescribe a rigid formula for proposals. Potential applicants are strongly advised to submit an outline of their aims and objectives before preparing a detailed proposal.

Funds can be made available for the implementation of innovatory projects in the field of early childhood care and education. Applicants can be public bodies, academic or non-governmental institutions, or voluntary organisations. Grants are not given to individuals or for general support to organisations or in response to general appeals. The Foundation does not provide study, research or travel grants.

The Foundation recognises that projects in its field of work require time to develop and implement new approaches and grants are normally made for more than one year. The long-term sustainability of a project is an important consideration in the appraisal of proposals.